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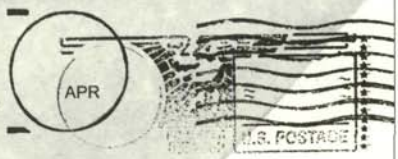

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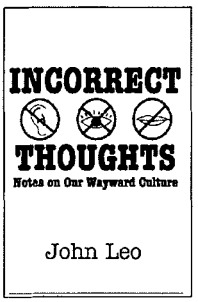

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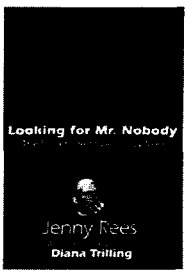

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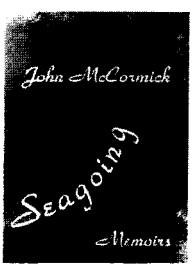

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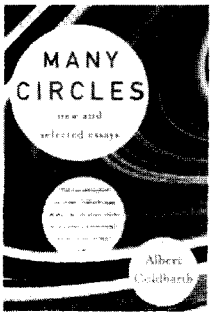

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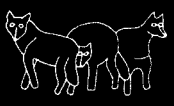

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ROBERT S. WISTRICH

Was Nietzsche a Fascist Thinker?

In 1934 Hitler's personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, took a famous picture of the leader of Nazi Germany contemplating the bust of Friedrich Nietzsche which stood in the reception room of the Nietzsche Archives in Weimar. Perhaps appropriately, only half of the philosopher's head was visible in the photograph, which would shortly appear in the German press with a caption that read: "The Führer before the bust of the German philosopher whose ideas have fertilized two great popular movements: the National Socialism of Germany and the Fascist movement of Italy." To mark the occasion of his historic visit, the director of the Archives, the octogenarian Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (sister of the dead philosopher) presented Hitler with the highly symbolic gift of Nietzsche's walking stick. This scene faithfully reflected a cult that would be carefully built up in the Third Reich to invoke Nietzsche as a spiritual guide and herald of the Nazi Revolution—a view that was widely shared at the time by the enemies of fascism. Now, at the turn of a new millennium and one hundred years after Nietzsche's death, this may be a good moment to reassess the most troubling aspects of his legacy.

Was Nietzsche really a spiritual godfather of fascism, a destroyer of the old tables of morality who through the power of his ideas seduced a whole generation of Germans into a Faustian pact with the Devil? Was he the philosopher-Antichrist that he proclaimed himself to be in his last works, whose apocalyptic visions were to be translated into genocidal practice in Hitler's war? Did his Promethean image of Man in a constant flux of becoming and self-creation, to whom nothing is forbidden and all is permitted, pave the way for the malignant tyrannies of the twentieth century? Or was Nietzsche one of the great liberators of mankind, profoundly misunderstood, unjustly maligned and demonized, an independent, critical spirit who challenged all orthodoxies and sought to free us from enslavement to ideological dogmas? Was he not a thinker whose astonishing influence derived precisely from the ambiguities and contradictions in his work, from the rich diversity of meanings and multiplicity of interpretations to which it remains open in rapidly changing

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cultural and political contexts? The open-ended nature of his legacy, its ability to transcend our conventional categories of Left and Right, of progress and reaction, rationality and irrationality, secularism and religiosity must surely be borne in mind when we reexamine the emotionally charged question of Nietzsche's "responsibility" for the catastrophes of the century that has just ended. So, too, we need to be aware that Nietzsche's aphoristic style, his prophetic aura and unsystematic method lent itself to arbitrary selection to suit the requirements of his readers. As far back as 1932, the radical German Jewish satirist Kurt Tucholsky quipped: "Tell me what you need and I will supply you with a Nietzsche citation. . . ." That health warning remains apposite even today.

An instructive example of such fluidity and the shifts in intellectual fashion is the way in which contemporary deconstructionist, post-structuralist, neo-Heideggerian, and Marxist critics regard Nietzsche as the quintessential prophet of postmodernity. Reflecting the current condition of radical epistemological indeterminacy, they now seem eager to embrace his insistence of the illusory, metaphorical nature of truth. The fragmentary open-endedness of Nietzsche's texts, once so derided by the Left, currently enhances his importance as a cultural critic of modernity, whose work completes and in some respects supercedes that of Marx. This is especially the case in France where Nietzsche belatedly became a godfather of postmodern consciousness through his influence on the writings of the late Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and others. The erosion of belief in a stable and unified truth, a radical conception of culture that emphasizes pluralism, heterogeneity, contradiction, desire, difference, and a subversive critique of reason paradoxically led to this postmodern, philosophically liberating Nietzsche—one very different from the image that used to prevail on the orthodox Marxist Left.

True, there were precursors of this trend even in the 1930s who argued against the stereotypical denunciation of Nietzsche as a fascist philosopher and reactionary class-enemy of socialism. One case in point was Georges Bataille, a left-wing existentialist thinker, who already in 1937, along with a number of other prominent French intellectuals, sought to rescue Nietzsche for the anti-fascist cause. Bataille emphasized the "anti-political," anarchist strand in Nietzsche which was oriented towards the sovereign, free-thinking individual, the affirmation of the body, the sense of eternal flux in nature, and the revulsion against collectivist ideologies such as Pan-Germanism, fascist racism, and Nazi anti-Semitism. Another early postwar defender of Nietzsche was Albert

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Camus, who presciently suggested in 1951 that the German philosopher was more a herald and a prophet of the crisis of values out of which totalitarianism had emerged, than a godfather of fascism per se. Nietzsche had announced the twentieth century, so Camus maintained, precisely because he represented "the sharpest consciousness of nihilism."

This was a far cry from the kind of demonization of Nietzsche on the postwar Marxist Left epitomized in the writings of Georg Lukács. In the 1930s, during his exile in Moscow, this Hungarian Stalinist and leading literary critic had already denounced Nietzsche as a central figure in the "destruction of reason" that led directly to Hitler. For Lukács, Nietzsche was not only a pure irrationalist but the ideological spokesman of a rapacious capitalist imperialism that had asserted itself in Germany after 1870, expressing to perfection the illiberal, anti-socialist and anti-democratic mindset of the ruling classes. He saw in Nietzsche the forerunner of fascist aesthetics, whose glorification of intuition, myth, and a new barbarism based on the instincts had anticipated in theory the true course of development of the Hitler regime as well as the imperialism of the emerging "American age." Lukács was especially infuriated by Nietzsche's denial of the existence of an "objective" external world and of the idea of progressive historical development as it had been elaborated by Marx.

Some of the more critical, independent Western Marxists, notably those of the Frankfurt School, did not share this reductionist view. Ernst Bloch, for example, saw in Nietzsche's advocacy of Dionysian, life-affirming impulses, the dawn of a subversive countermovement against the repressive character of Western culture—one which embodied a utopian promise. Herbert Marcuse, the guru of the neo-Marxist Left in America in the 1950s and '60s, also embraced Nietzsche as a critic of the "technical rationality of modern civilization," as a great transvaluer of values who had exposed the fallacies on which most of Western philosophy and morality were built. In postwar West Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer similarly praised Nietzsche's "negative dialectics," seeing a parallel with their own radical critique of the leveling nature of modern mass culture and its dehumanizing tendencies. Nietzsche's aesthetic orientation, his individualism and contempt for the "mass man" was congenial enough for a critical Marxist theory that had virtually abandoned the proletariat as its revolutionary subject and turned itself into a "*Kulturkritik*." Indeed, rather than being regarded as a forerunner of fascism, Nietzsche was seen by Adorno as an important demystifier of the "dialectic of Enlightenment" and its all-embracing "instrumental rationality" which had helped to produce totalitarianism.

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Thus, to a certain extent, the Frankfurt School anticipated the late twentieth-century rehabilitation of Nietzsche on the Marxist Left.

The opposite tendency can be found in the writings of the controversial conservative historian of ideas, Ernst Nolte. Already in his seminal *Three Faces of Fascism* (1963) he had claimed that Nietzsche was "the first to give voice to that spiritual focal point towards which all fascism must gravitate"—the assault on practical and theoretical transcendence, for the sake of a "more beautiful" form of life. Nolte presented Nietzsche not only as the intellectual godfather of fascism but also as an inspiration for Nazism's exterminatory drive. He was the thinker who had dreamed of wiping out two millennia of "anti-nature" and human disfiguration created by the debilitating morality and conscience invented by Judeo-Christianity. In a subsequent work, written in the mid-1980s, Nolte again presented Nietzsche along with Marx as the great presager of the European *Bürgerkrieg* (civil war) of the twentieth century and the mass exterminations linked to it. In 1990, in his study entitled *Nietzsche and Nietzscheanism*, Nolte went even further, suggesting that Nietzsche constructed the image of a fascism more radical than even Hitler could ever have hoped to implement. Thus it was a thinker of the German conservative Right who issued an indictment of Nietzsche more far-reaching than any fabricated by the Stalinist and orthodox Left—this, moreover, at a time when many Marxists had embraced a free-floating form of Nietzscheanism. The bitter irony of this role reversal was compounded by Nolte's obstinate relativizing of the mass murder of European Jewry and his convoluted flirtation with some of the theses advanced by Holocaust deniers. Nevertheless, the intellectual link between Nietzsche and the horrors of Nazism should not be dismissed out of hand.

One cannot ignore the fact, for example, that Nietzsche was clearly an elitist who believed in the right to rule of a "good and healthy aristocracy," one which would, if necessary, be ready to sacrifice untold numbers of human beings "with a good conscience." Nietzsche did sometimes write as if nations primarily existed for the sake of producing a few "great men" who could not be expected to show consideration for "normal humanity." Not surprisingly, in the light of the cruel century which has just ended, one is bound to regard such statements with grave misgivings. From Mussolini and Hitler to Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and Saddam Hussein, the last eighty years have been riddled with so-called political geniuses, imagining that they were "beyond good and evil" and free of any moral constraints. One is obliged to ask if there is not something in Nietzsche's philosophy with its uninhibited cultivation

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of a "heroic individualism" and the "will to power," which may in practice tend to favor the fascist ethos, even if this was never his explicit intention.

Similarly, Nietzsche's vehement negation of the Christian morality which arose out of priestly Judaism, his questionable concepts of decadence and degeneration as well as his hatred of the leveling doctrines of socialist egalitarianism, do seem to point in this direction. It did not prove particularly difficult in inter-war Europe to mobilize Nietzsche's writings for the cause of conservative counterrevolution, fascist vitalism, or even for the Nazi philosophy of politics, though not without serious distortions of his texts. Benito Mussolini, for example, raised the Nietzschean formulation "Live dangerously!" (*vivi pericolosamente*) to the status of a fascist slogan. His reading of Nietzsche was one factor in converting the founder of Italian fascism from Marxism to a philosophy of sacrifice and warlike deeds in defense of the fatherland. In this mutation, Mussolini had been preceded by his countryman, Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose passage from aestheticism to the political activism of a new, more virile and warlike age was greatly influenced by Nietzsche. The French fascist intellectual, Drieu La Rochelle, like many "socialist" fascists in the inter-war period, likewise enlisted Nietzsche's vitalist philosophy and volontarism in his polemics against bourgeois materialism and the historical determinism of the Marxists.

Equally, there were other representatives of the First World War generation, like the extremely influential German nationalist writer Ernst Jünger, who would find in Nietzsche's writings a legitimation of the warrior ethos. Oswald Spengler's best-selling *The Decline of the West*, one of the post-1918 philosophies of history that most profoundly influenced fascist ideas, also claimed Nietzsche as a major source of inspiration. He reinterpreted Nietzsche (in the image of Weimar's conservative revolutionaries) as the prophet of a new breed of superior and heroic "men of action" whose Faustian "will to power," aristocratic instincts, and contempt for the masses, would enable them to master the crisis of the moment and its historical tasks.

The Nazis incorporated and radicalized this Nietzschean vocabulary of heroic, soldierly virtues and virile activism, fusing it with a more far-reaching eugenic vision of racial engineering, freed of any moral restraints. They took certain phrases from Nietzsche's works relating to the "annihilation of decaying races" or the "dominion over the earth as means of producing a higher type" and interpreted them with brutal literalness as a license to kill with a good conscience. Even if we accept (as I do) that this was a willfully arbitrary misunderstanding of Nietzsche,

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it still raises uncomfortable questions. For inevitably, one must ask whether this was entirely accidental. Could a more liberal philosopher—for argument's sake John Locke or Thomas Jefferson—have been misused with equal ease? In all probability, most people would answer in the negative. However, it is worth noting that Immanuel Kant (usually considered a touchstone for ethical humanism in German thought) had more advocates than Nietzsche among the academic philosophers in the Third Reich, which suggests that the possibilities for manipulation are vast.

It could perhaps be argued that Nietzsche's pathos, his imaginative excesses as well as his reputation as a prophet-seer and creator of myths, were especially conducive to abuse by fascists. More importantly, the radical manner in which Nietzsche thrust himself against the boundaries of conventional (Judeo-Christian) morality and dramatically proclaimed "God is dead" undoubtedly appealed to something in Nazism that wished to transgress and transcend all existing taboos. The totalitarianisms of the twentieth century (of both the Right and Left) were forged out of this breakdown of all authority and moral norms, of which Nietzsche was indeed a clear-sighted prophet, precisely because he had diagnosed nihilism as the central problem of his society. For him there was no way back to the old moral certainties about "good" and "evil," no way to regain firm ground under one's feet. Humanity had (spiritually speaking) already burned its boats. Nietzsche was convinced that there was no escape from the "nihilism" of the age, except to go forward into a more "perfect nihilism," a more radical activist position that embraced goal-lessness as a necessary step in the overcoming of nihilism. In that sense, he was indeed a harbinger of the twentieth century.

Nietzsche believed that only by honestly facing the stark truth that there is no truth, no goal, no value or meaning in itself, could he pave the way for a real intellectual liberation and a revaluation of all values. There was nothing fascistic per se in this call for a radical and critical self-examination, though Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie* (by giving precedence to the needs of life over those of the spirit) had some potentially dangerous implications. Nietzsche's call in *Ecce Homo* (1888) to form that "new party of life which undertakes the greatest of all tasks, the improvement of mankind, including the ruthless destruction of all that is degenerate or parasitical" could assume frightening dimensions in the hands of Nazi eugenicists. Yet it cannot be emphasized too strongly that Nietzsche never envisaged any attempt to appeal to the masses or to engage in any form of political activism in his own day.

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Much of the confusion identifying Nietzsche with National Socialism can be traced back to the disastrous role played by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (married to a prominent German anti-Semite) who took control of his manuscripts in the 1890s, when he was mentally and physically incapacitated. By the 1920s she had promoted her brother as the philosopher of fascism, sending her warmest good wishes (and those of the Nietzsche Archive) to Benito Mussolini as "the inspired reawakener of aristocratic values in Nietzsche's sense." As is well known, she was also an enthusiastic admirer of Hitler.

Her ceaseless efforts to encourage an image of her brother as a great patriotic German eventually bore fruit when the Nazis seized power. In 1934 they decided that the time had come to give themselves some semblance of intellectual respectability by publishing popular and inexpensive anthologies of Nietzschean thought. It goes without saying that these were travesties of Nietzschean thought designed to promote militarism, masculine hardness, and Germanic values. Alfred Bäumler, who was a professor of philosophy in Berlin after 1933, on seeing German youth march under the swastika banner, could enthusiastically write: "and when we call 'Heil Hitler!' to this youth then we are greeting at the same time Friedrich Nietzsche with that call." Bäumler was to play a key role in the shameless appropriation of Nietzsche as a philosopher of the Nordic race, a kind of intellectual Siegfried, anti-Roman, anti-Christian, and thoroughly in tune with the martial spirit of 1914. Aware that Nietzsche had no theory of *Volk* or race, Bäumler unscrupulously concocted a link between his individual struggle for integrity and Nazi ideals of heroism. With the same sleight of hand, he would explain away Nietzsche's break with Wagner as a product of personal envy and dismiss his tirades against the Germans as expressing no more than disapproval of certain "non-Germanic" elements in their character.

No less convoluted were the efforts of the Nazi ideologue Heinrich Härtle (in his book *Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus* (1939)) to present the philosopher as "a great ally in the present spiritual warfare." Härtle knew that Nietzsche's advocacy of a "European" outlook, his skeptical individualism, approval of race-mixing, and opposition to anti-Semitism contradicted Nazi ideology. By relativizing these shortcomings as minor issues (in the case of the Jews he simply quoted instances—comparatively few in number—where Nietzsche seemed to be attacking them) and reflections of a different political environment, Härtle could present Nietzsche as a precursor of Hitler. By selectively focusing on Nietzsche's attacks against democracy and socialism, on those comments that seemed like a glorification of war, or to advocate the breeding of a

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new race of supermen, the philosopher could be enlisted for the Third Reich. This method was employed even more cynically by the Nazi regime's official ideologist, Alfred Rosenberg, who in 1944 claimed Nietzsche as a "spiritual brother" whose alleged enemies—the Marxists, Jews, and international profiteers—were the same as those who confronted the Nazi Reich. His selective quotations from Nietzsche were primarily intended to mobilize the German people for total war.

Such crude distortions were also echoed in Allied war propaganda and in newspaper headlines in Britain and America which (continuing the traditions of the First World War) depicted the "insane philosopher" as the source of a ruthless German barbarism and as Hitler's favorite author. Phrases torn out of context such as the "Superman," the "blond beast," "master morality," or the "will to power" were turned into slogans that demonstrated Nietzsche's supposed identification with German militarism and imperialism, though nothing had been further from his mind.

Not everyone shared this increasingly broad consensus before 1939 that Nietzsche was the intellectual godfather of fascism and Nazism. Even in the Third Reich there were Nazi philosophers such as Ernst Krieck (a professor of philosophy and pedagogy in Heidelberg) who realized how radically Nietzsche had opposed all forms of German nationalism, socialism, and racist anti-Semitism—three core components of National Socialism. Others like Arthur Drews (a professor of philosophy in Karlsruhe) stressed that Nietzsche was an extreme individualist lacking any concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the *Volk* community) or understanding of the importance of collectivism in the Nazi creed. Drews pointed to Nietzsche's "good Europeanism," his enmity to all things German and his positive view of the Jews, as elements in his worldview which made it wholly inappropriate to honor him as the philosopher of National Socialism.

In wartime America, the dominant trend was to emphasize the compatibility between the Nietzschean transvaluation of values and the "revolution of nihilism" that Nazism was seeking to implement. This was the thesis put forward in 1939 by Hermann Rauschning, a former Nazi who had fled to the United States. It was echoed two years later by Rohan Butler in a book on the German roots of National Socialism. Another prominent wartime advocate of the thesis that Nietzsche had been a proto-Nazi was the Harvard historian Crane Brinton, though he did acknowledge another side to his thought.

The first major change in this picture was brought about by an American scholar of German background, Walter Kaufmann, who subsequently provided some of the most authoritative translations into

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English of Nietzsche's writings. Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950) became a standard work in the critical rehabilitation of Nietzsche in the English-speaking world. It recast him in the image of Anglo-American liberal humanism, as a cultural and critical individualist severed from any connection to Social Darwinism or to the intellectual origins of National Socialism. Kaufmann undoubtedly contributed much to correcting the myths concerning Nietzsche that were rampant in America though he tended to render the German philosopher in a more benign and sterile manner than the original texts warranted.

Kaufmann did, however, demonstrate Nietzsche's scorn for German nationalist aspirations, his distrust of all dogmas, and suspicion of the State as a "cold monster" incompatible with human self-realization. He showed that Nietzsche had advocated intermarriage between different nations, believing that German culture had emerged only after a "strong mixture with Slavic blood," and that he even took pride in his Polish ancestry (though this was probably fictive).

A more controversial issue remains the extent to which Nietzsche's anti-Christian polemics were a factor in paving the way towards fascism and Nazism. In *The Antichrist* (1888) (perhaps the most unbalanced of his works) Nietzsche rails in a disturbingly violent manner against the Jewish founders of Christianity—especially against St. Paul—even as he inverts the claims of Christian anti-Semites. It is, however, important to notice the boldness of his reversal of the "supercessionist" assertions of Christianity with regard to Judaism—claims which are much less frequently heard today, but which, at the time, were the stock-in-trade of both Catholic and Protestant theology. Nietzsche's opposition to the Christian annexation of the Bible, which he regarded as a historical and philological outrage, is strikingly radical. For him, Christianity was the dross of Biblical Judaism and the New Testament merely the palest of echoes of the Hebrew Bible, which he looked upon with awe and reverence. For Nietzsche, there could be no comparison between the grandeur of human beings as depicted in the Old Testament and what he regarded as the tasteless sentimentality and "petty sectarianism" of the New: to have "glued this New Testament, a kind of rococo of taste in every respect, to the Old Testament to form one book. . .is perhaps the greatest audacity and 'sin against the spirit' that literary Europe has on its conscience."

Nietzsche's attitude to Christianity, the Jews, and anti-Semitism is, of course, pertinent to any assessment of his place in the intellectual prehistory of National Socialism. There are those who see in his ferocious

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attack on the Christian morality of his time a direct link to Nazi neo-paganism. Having abandoned the Lutheranism of his childhood, Nietzsche (especially in his last works) proclaimed a war to the death against the value system of Christianity, accusing it of having distorted and denatured all life-affirming values. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, the love of one's neighbor, charity, humility, and compassion, stood in sharp contrast to his own Dionysian vision of an authentic and empowered existence. At the center of his philosophy lay a sustained celebration of creativity, the affirmation of life and natural instincts, the invention of new values and norms that were antithetical to those propagated by the German Protestant Christianity which had formed his childhood and adolescence.

One can certainly agree that Nietzsche was a vehement opponent of Judeo-Christianity, whose legacy was eagerly invoked by many fascists and Nazis. His diatribes against "the Jewish fanaticism of a St. Paul" (seen by him as the "greatest of all apostles of revenge") are well known. The early Christians—inspired by priestly Judaism—had in his opinion brought down the Roman Empire through their enmity to everything noble, proud, and privileged. For Nietzsche this was the most fateful and catastrophic revaluation (*Umwertung*) of values in world history. He blamed Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity for having spread notions of sin, guilt punishment, and repentance—thereby creating the fiction of a "moral world order"—which had subverted everything that was strong, healthy, beautiful, and brave. Priestly Judaism (and its offshoots in the Gospels) was for Nietzsche the beginning of "the slave-revolt in morals," a source of "decadence" which he believed found its modern secular echoes in the leveling doctrines of liberalism, utilitarian rationalism, and socialism.

Nietzsche did regard the Jewish revolution in ethics which had triumphed in Pauline Christianity as the ultimate victory of Judaic ressentiment, by means of which the Jews had overthrown Greco-Roman aristocratic values and taken their revenge on a hostile Gentile world. Under the sign of the Cross, they had achieved the triumph of Judea over Rome, for ever since this spiritual revolution, almost half of the earth had bowed down to three Jews and one Jewess—Jesus, Peter, Paul, and Mary! According to Nietzsche's dramatic interpretation, the Jews had in effect created Christianity—a religion in which they did not believe—in order to undermine their Roman conquerors. They were responsible for the ghastly paradox of a "God on the Cross," the awesome image of an "unimaginable ultimate cruelty and self-crucifixion of God for the salvation of man." The priestly culture of Judaism which

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had produced Christianity, had thereby accomplished "a miracle of falsification" and a devastating deformation of all natural instincts.

It is not difficult to see in Nietzsche's onslaught on Judeo-Christianity a struggle with his own inner demons (a reckoning with the ghost of his own Lutheran pastor-father?), an expression of his tormented path to self-knowledge and visceral revulsion against the supernatural terminology on which he had been reared. It was no accident that he extolled pagan antiquity as "a world without a concept or sense of sin" or declared (as a disciple of Dionysus) that he much preferred to be a satyr than a saint. No doubt, he unconsciously blamed his own deeply inhibited sexuality on black-frocked pietistic oppressors, something which could only heighten his appreciation of the uninhibited voluptuousness in Dionysian intoxication. Much of his early infatuation with Wagner as an artist and prophet might be traced to these contradictory personal drives and his own desperate search for an alternative mode of redemption without the burden of sin. This period in his life (which he only overcame in his mid-thirties) was the one in which Nietzsche came closest to succumbing to anti-Semitism and to a politicized advocacy of the renewal of German culture. Indeed, had Nietzsche remained under Wagner's spell, he might well have degenerated into the philosopher of National Socialism *avant la lettre* that so many critics have claimed him to be. However, any close reading of Nietzsche's writings after 1878 must surely lead to the conclusion that he had radically moved away from Wagner's prejudices—including anti-Semitism, the cult of "Aryan" superiority, and the romantic fusion of Germanism with Christianity. This was not achieved without some regressions, confusing diversions, and polemical exaggeration. This is also true, though to a lesser degree, of his observations about Jews and Judaism, to which he attributed considerable significance.

In his *Human, All Too Human* (1878) Nietzsche admiringly observed extraordinary accumulation of capital, spirit, and will by European Jews—an acquisition "so huge that it had to incur the envy and hate-filled measures in the form of literary indecencies in almost all our nations. . .making Jews scapegoats for all conceivable public and private misfortunes and leading them to the slaughterhouse." In *The Gay Science* (1882), he praised Jews for their sharp analytical qualities, the precision of their writing, and their rationalism. In his autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, he even claimed that "Jews among Germans are always the higher race—more refined, spiritual, kind." Their long history of suffering had made them more adaptable, intelligent, shrewd, witty, and tough than most Gentiles. Not only did Nietzsche come to regard the

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Jews as "the strongest, toughest, purest race in Europe," endowed with a remarkable moral genius, he was increasingly convinced that they would provide that "aristocracy of the spirit" which a new post-Christian Europe desperately needed. In *Daybreak* (1881) he singled out their "self-possession and endurance in fearful situations. . .their courage beneath the cloak of miserable submissions, their heroism. . .[which] surpassed the virtues of all the saints." They had survived as Christianity's great "Other" in the harsh discipline of the Diaspora, and yet they had still retained their liberality of soul and generosity of spirit.

Indeed, Nietzsche asserted in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) that "the Jews, if they wanted it—or if they were forced into it, which seems to be what the anti-Semites want—*could* and *now* have preponderance, indeed quite literally mastery over Europe, that is certain." At the same time, he made it clear that this was *not* what European Jewry sought—on the contrary their only desire was to be absorbed and integrated into society—to bring their long Diasporic wandering to an end. This was a goal which Nietzsche unequivocally supported, in stark contrast to the anti-Semites and even more to the Nazis who fifty years later aimed at the eradication of the "Jewish spirit" and at a Europe emptied of its Jews. If Nazism conceived of Jewry as an inferior race of "subhumans" marked for physical annihilation, then Nietzsche's own writings show, on the contrary, that the Jews represented for him a kind of spiritual crystallization of what he understood by the *Übermensch* of the future.

At first sight, this sharp antithesis might seem enough to settle the question concerning Nietzsche's responsibility for Nazism in the negative. Certainly, a thinker who held such a high opinion of Jewish qualities, who looked to them as a spearhead for his own free-thinking Dionysian "revaluation of all values" and sought their full integration, could hardly be an inspiration for the Nazi Holocaust. Moreover, Nietzsche's abhorrence of both Christian and racist anti-Semitism is well documented. He was outraged by his sister's marriage to Bernhard Förster, a leading German anti-Semite, and this led for a while to a break in their relations. He loathed the misuse of his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1882–1892) by the German racist propagandist Theodor Fritsch. He despised the anti-Semitic demagogy of the Protestant court-preacher Adolf Stoecker, head of the Christian-social party in Germany. He heaped contempt on the nationalist historiography of Heinrich von Treitschke (a Prussian anti-Semite) and mocked the vicious, mean-spirited Judeophobia of his former hero, Richard Wagner. His contemptuous remarks about Germany's most extreme anti-Semite in the 1880s, Eugen Dühring, are almost unprintable. Anti-Semitism in Nietzsche's

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eyes represented the lowest form of European culture—it was synonymous with the mentality and outlook of the *Schlechtweggekommene* (an almost untranslatable German term for misfits) for the bungled, botched, and envious losers in life. It was the epitome of a neurotic culture of ressentiment, another key word of reprobation in the Nietzschean vocabulary and in his analysis of modern decadence. The fact that Nazi propagandists (and some misguided scholars to this day) nonetheless present Nietzsche as an anti-Semite must surely stand as one of the gravest falsifications in modern intellectual history.

Nevertheless, there were ambiguities in the terminology and in the sweeping historical generalizations of Nietzsche which laid his work open to misuse. His sweeping rejection of Judeo-Christian values (as they were mirrored in German Protestantism) misleadingly referred to their origin in the sublime "vengefulness" of Israel, which according to Nietzsche, led to its exploitation of movements of "decadence" to ensure its own self-preservation and survival. Even though Nietzsche's prime target was Christianity and he sympathized with the critical Jewish spirit, the source of modern decadence nevertheless lay in that fateful transvaluation of values created by priestly Judaism two thousand years ago. More dangerous still, when describing the "Judaization" of the world in terms that mixed admiration with disapprobation, Nietzsche was unconsciously feeding the myth of Jewish power, so beloved of both Christian and racist anti-Semites. Though his intentions were profoundly hostile to anti-Semitism, this provocative technique was undoubtedly a risky game to play. Though Nietzsche was not responsible for such distortions, one can find troubling echoes of a vulgarized Nietzscheanism in the vicious diatribes of Hitler, Himmler, Bormann, and Rosenberg against Christianity during the last years of the Third Reich. The poisonous Nazi rhetoric directed against Judeo-Christian teaching and the Christian churches could partly draw on a debased version of Nietzsche's own anti-Christian polemics.

The case of Nietzsche is, however, a good illustration of the pitfalls in any overly schematic approach to intellectual history which takes particular strands in a thinker's *oeuvre*, seeking to fit them into more general constructs like fascism or National Socialism. On the basis of Nietzsche's declared hostility to Christianity, liberal democracy, and socialism, it is possible to see him as a precursor of the fascist synthesis. On the other hand, as we have seen, he was very far removed from Nazi thinking about race (he scorned the "Aryan" myth and judged people on individual merit), about the Jews, or about German nationalism. Some aspects of his admiration for ancient Greek culture and for

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Romanitas were used by both the fascists and Nazis—but only by thoroughly distorting his philosophical intent. Though he took the ancient Greeks as cultural models, he did not subscribe to that self-conception which had prompted them as a "breed of masters" to brand non-Greek foreigners as "barbarians," fit only to be slaves. Indeed, all forms of xenophobia were alien to Nietzsche's outlook, no less than the hot-headed chauvinist rivalries so typical of the European nation-state system in his time. This helps explain his revulsion to the German nationalism which had come into vogue in the 1880s following the unification of Germany and the success of Bismarckian power politics. In fact, in many respects Nietzsche was the least patriotic and least German of his philosophical contemporaries in the Second Reich. This was one of the major reasons for his abandonment of Wagner and the Bayreuth Festival, which had degenerated into a hysterically narrow-minded celebration of "German Art," "German virtues," and so-called "Germanic essence," deeply contaminated by "the humbug of races" and anti-Semitism. The fact that the Wagnerites gave a romantic-Christian veneer to their cult of "Germanism" reinforced his revulsion at the sorry spectacle.

Nietzsche reserved a special animus for the ways in which the Christian churches in Germany allowed themselves to be swept along by the national intoxication after 1870. The roots of this phenomenon lay in the Lutheran Reformation which Nietzsche deplored as a kind of "peasant revolt of the spirit" that had destroyed the promise of the Italian Renaissance with its revival of pagan and classical traditions. Luther had resurrected the Pauline theology which Nietzsche so detested, and had awakened the demons of German nationalism. But the betrayal went much deeper. Nietzsche firmly believed that the institutional Church had for centuries distorted the innermost reality of faith and the original symbolism of Christianity as represented in the life of Jesus—for whom he retained both respect and a strange fascination. That was the meaning of his famous epigram, that "in reality there has been only one Christian, and he died on the Cross." German Protestantism, despite its claims of returning to original Biblical teachings and an inner-worldly spirituality, was for Nietzsche still hopelessly entangled by its subordination to the Prussian State (which it had divinized) and vulgarized by its association with modern German nationalism and anti-Semitic demagogy.

Nietzsche's insight into the potential of these developments was an important catalyst for his proclamation that "God is dead," meaning that "the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable"—which

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as he intuitively grasped, would have incalculable consequences for the future of Europe. He saw the symptoms of the coming disaster, even if his personal solution of philosophical self-overcoming and the existential call to become our own legislators in the sense of fully autonomous individuals, remained incapable of averting it.

Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, frequently evoked by fascists and Nazis, was the product of deep introspection and self-analysis. It was intended to assert a life-affirming outlook that would empower the individual to overcome his or her limitations by questioning all our assumptions concerning truth, logic, beliefs, culture, values, and history. It was a teaching of self-transcendence that was fundamentally personal in character, which did not prevent it from being exploited by twentieth-century practitioners of mass politics, few of whom had seriously read Nietzsche. What he had prized above all was spiritual power (*Macht*), not the brute political force which he saw embodied around him in slogans such as "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*" that he denounced with contempt. This empowerment of the sovereign, emancipated individual who is "master of a free will" involved a long and difficult process of sublimation that would eventually culminate in self-mastery. It was a vision fundamentally antithetical to the totalitarian collectivism of the twentieth century.

What then remains of the terrible accusation that Nietzsche was the godfather of fascism, or worse still, a spiritual progenitor of the Nazi movement and even of the Holocaust? At a purely ideological level there is a superficial plausibility to the connection sometimes made between Nietzsche's anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic, and anti-socialist outlook and the fascist worldview—at least the link to those varieties of fascism relatively free of Judeophobia. But even this schematic interpretation ignores the fact that many conservatives shared Nietzsche's aristocratic values without being remotely drawn to fascist movements. Indeed, conservative aversion to fascism derived in part, at least, from a deep distrust of the politics of mass mobilization and the "mob" values of the herd, which Nietzsche himself always despised. Furthermore, it is difficult to conceive of any form of fascism which did not actively promote ultra-nationalism and denounce "cosmopolitanism," exactly the reverse of Nietzsche's own position as a "good European" and an unequivocal opponent of tribal nationalism. In the case of Imperial Germany, this is particularly striking. Nietzsche's indictment of the Christian and nationalist Right as well as of Bismarckian *Machtpolitik* and its consequences for German culture, was unequivocal. The break with Wagner is crucial in this respect because the Wagnerian ideology

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and the cult that developed in Bayreuth was truly a herald of *völkisch* and Hitlerian ideas. Once Nietzsche had thrown off the romanticism of his early days, his devastating critique of Wagner—prophetic in many ways of what was to come—revealed with what penetrating insight he saw through its dangerous illusions. National Socialism could plausibly derive inspiration from Wagner but it could only use Nietzsche by fundamentally twisting his philosophy.

What then of Nietzsche's "immoralism" and rejection of traditional Judeo-Christian values? It could be argued that what he most detested in Christianity derived from what he simplistically interpreted as the Judaic triumph over so-called "noble values." Indeed, it was in this sense that anti-Christian and *völkisch* anti-Semites did exploit Nietzsche's writings. But Nietzsche in his own lifetime vehemently opposed both the Christian and anti-Christian varieties of anti-Semitism which, along with biological racism, formed the ideological basis for the Nazi "final solution." Moreover, his loathing of the Wagnerians suggests how far removed he would have been from any modern political religion like National Socialism with its Führer-cult based on blind, uncritical obedience, herd-mentality, and the ressentiment of the masses.

Furthermore, Nietzsche's relentless questioning of all dogmas, systems, and established values was hardly the basis on which fascist, Nazi, or Communist totalitarian regimes consolidated their support. On the contrary, such regimes, however radical their intentions, were quick to repress all independent criticism, appealed to conventional morality and incited nationalist feelings in order to broaden their following. Nietzsche's intellectual honesty, not to mention his love of ambiguity and paradox, was totally removed from such manipulations which he would surely have abhorred.

However, Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher and deconstructionist, reminds us of a pertinent point which perhaps only the coming century will be able to resolve. "The future of the Nietzsche text is not closed. But if, within the still open contours of an era, the only politics calling itself—proclaiming itself—Nietzschean will have been a Nazi one, then it is necessarily significant and must be questioned in all consequences."

Nietzsche was a radical, iconoclastic thinker, parts of whose legacy were annexed with disconcerting ease by the Nazis and fascists. Yet they also appealed to an astonishing range of artistic movements, ideologies, and avant-garde intellectuals far from removed from fascism. There is no need to idealize him or sentimentalize his personal tragedy, nor would it be right to sterilize his thought in ways that would render him

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too benign or politically correct. He was no admirer of modernity or of the liberal vision of progress. He was certainly no democrat. Nietzsche adamantly repudiated the doctrine of equality, and he was no "humanist" in the conventional sense of that term. His thinking lacked any concrete social anchor and his solution to the problem of nihilism ultimately led to a cul-de-sac. But he was also a man of remarkable integrity and a bold thinker who in Freud's words "had a more penetrating knowledge of himself than any other man who had ever lived or was likely to live." That other great psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung, astutely suggested that Nietzsche's own tragic life and the unresolvable contradictions in his personality were in some uncanny way a forecast of the fate of Germany and its self-destruction through Nazism. No other contemporary saw as deeply into the pathologies of fin de siècle German and European culture or seemed to intuit so surely the catastrophe that was to come. A hundred years after his death we are still facing a similar crisis of values and the frightening spiritual vacuum that Friedrich Nietzsche so acutely diagnosed at the heart of Western civilization. The warning of Zarathustra that if nothing is true, then all is permitted, still haunts our future.

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FRED SIEGEL

Mayors and Morality: Daley and Lindsay Then and Now

Chicago's traditional tribalism looks remarkably similar to the modern multiculturalism of the Democratic Party.

—Paul McGrath, high-ranking advisor to former Chicago mayor Jane Byrne

HISTORY SEEMS TO HAVE come full circle for the Daleys of Chicago. In 1960 Mayor Richard J. Daley, who had been elected with black votes, temporarily made himself a hero to liberal Democrats when he played a key role in electing John Kennedy president. Forty years later his oldest son William Daley, working with Jesse Jackson, ran the campaign to put Al Gore into the White House. Over the past forty years of racial politics the Daleys have gone from darlings to demons and back again.

Political archetypes sometimes play tricks on us. Consider John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. They were born just six years apart yet JFK is frozen in our memory as forever youthful, while few can imagine Reagan as anything but doddering. Mayors John Lindsay of New York and Richard J. Daley of Chicago are remembered as the antithetical embodiments of the 1960s urban crisis. Yet New York and Chicago are anything but typical. "New York," notes Saul Bellow, "is a European city though of no known nationality." While only a Bertolt Brecht could imagine that Chicago, a city of Slavs governed by Irishmen along the lines of European Christian Democracy, was typically American. Neither man's national reputation seemed to have survived the era's cauldron of racial politics. Both men reached their nadir in 1972: Lindsay in his brief but disastrous run for the presidency; Daley when his delegation was refused admittance to the Democratic convention only to be replaced by a group led by Jesse Jackson.

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Nonetheless, the two mayors became ideograms frozen in the paratactic moments of urban rioting. The image of Lindsay that still endures is of a caring man walking the streets of Harlem, courageously keeping the city relatively calm as other cities went up in flames. The primary author of the Kerner Commission report on urban riots, Lindsay saw racism not only as a scourge but as virtually the sole explanation for African-American poverty. The jowly Daley by contrast was as rough-edged as Lindsay was smooth. His frustrated press secretary once blurted, "Print what he means not what he says." One of his most famous malapropisms was, "The policeman isn't there to create disorder; the policeman is there to preserve disorder." Daley's infamous "shoot to kill" arsonists order during the 1968 riots as well as the police riots that accompanied the Democratic Convention of that year are often the first things his name brings to mind.

Daley's and Lindsay's names were taken as the pole stars of city politics. Here's how *The Boston Globe* described the once-promising career of Mayor Kevin White when he left office: "Elected in 1967 as Boston's answer to John Lindsay, New York's young reform mayor, White left in 1984 as Boston's Richard Daley, the aging and resented Chicago machine boss." In the mid-1960s, Lindsay, his picture on the cover of all the newsweeklies, was seen as nothing less than the Second Coming of JFK. His youth, vigor, and moral commitment to racial equality gave him an extraordinary aura. There was even talk—talk that Lindsay encouraged—that he was likely to be president some day. But if Lindsay was once revered, this New York mayor who was supposed to represent the future of urban America has since been largely forgotten, while Daley, the man reviled as a dinosaur, is not only remembered but extolled as forerunner of today's successful new-wave mayors.

While Lindsay has been ranked as one of the worst big city mayors, the same poll of political scientists and historians selected Daley as the single best mayor of the late twentieth century and one of the ten best in American history. Today Daley's son, Richard M. Daley, reigns virtually unchallenged as his father's legatee. And at a time when mayors like to think of themselves as efficient managers rather than the social conscience of the country, the phrase "Boss Daley," popularized by Mike Royko, has, says Alan Ehrenhalt, "lost the evil connotation for most people that it seemed to have a quarter-century ago."

Why the reversal? In part, says political analyst Jim Chapin, it is a matter both of exoticism and of subtly shifting standards. In the sixties, jowly, aging, overweight machine politicians were old hat, a dime a dozen; the blow-dried dynamic Lindsay seemed different and promising.

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But today, in an era of smiling empty suits, Lindsay's style no longer looks promisingly authentic. Instead, a nostalgic haze glosses over the cigar chomping, backroom corruption, and police brutality of the Daley years. Today we can chuckle at the informal slogan of Fred Roti, a longtime First Ward alderman: "Vote for Fred Roti and no one gets hurt." The notorious mob-run First Ward also had Jackie "the Lackey" Cerone who, when described by the Associated Press as a "minor gangland figure," called to complain about the "minor."

At a time when liberals have largely given up on universalism, Daley's tribalism no longer seems so egregious. In retrospect, notes Paul McGrath, Daley was the least racist mayoral candidate of the 1950s and '60s in a city whose whites seethed with anti-black animus. Daley first won election in 1955 against the backdrop of a two-year-long, sometimes violent campaign by whites to keep blacks out of the far South Side of Chicago. The white incumbent Martin Kennelly openly courted backlash voters, while black voters backed Daley in order to bring down Kennelly. It was a measure of Daley's skill that he was endorsed by both *The Chicago Defender*, the city's leading black newspaper, and by white groups on the far South Side. Unable to adapt to the new climate of civil rights, Daley tried, with mixed success, to fit blacks into the machine politics mold. As he famously put it, "Why don't they act like the Poles, Jews, and the Irish?"

But if Daley was unable to see how the history of racism made the black condition distinctive, for Lindsay blacks were *sui generis*. Lindsay governed a liberal city that had already experienced something of a civil rights movement in the late 1940s and '50s. Yet by confronting the issue of race as simply a matter of white racism, Lindsay, the patrician paternalist, so empathized with black anger that he left his city far more polarized than he found it. While Daley couldn't see why the grandchildren of slaves and the children of semi-enslaved sharecroppers needed special help, Lindsay exempted African-Americans from any code of conduct. He explained away any and all behavior by those who claimed to speak for black anger.

Lindsay believed that government could save the cities and right innumerable wrongs. But three decades of HUD policy makes it hard to maintain that optimism. President Clinton's first HUD secretary, Henry Cisneros, testified to Congress in June 1993: "HUD has in many cases exacerbated the declining quality of life in America's cities." A dramatic case in point: the 1968 National Housing Act created the Section 235 program to provide subsidized loans to low-income families, with special assistance for welfare mothers, to buy houses. When the vast majority of

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the new owners defaulted on these loans there was widespread abandonment and devastation. Carl Levin then Detroit City Council President, now a liberal Democratic senator, called the upshot "Hurricane HUD." *The Chicago Tribune* wrote that "no natural disaster on record has caused destruction on the scale of the government's housing programs. . . ." For a Gotham analog we have only to look to East New York in the 1960s, where urban renewal and HUD policy produced massive foreclosures in private properties bought with federal aid. More recently a real estate revival in Harlem has been stalled by a new HUD scandal in which the Section 203(k) program created in 1978 to bring stability to low-income neighborhoods has been used, explains *The New York Times*, by "real estate speculators, mortgage lenders and nonprofit groups involved in a complex scheme in which they pocketed millions in rehabilitation money and profits from selling and reselling the buildings in quick succession."

As the passions of the sixties cooled and the costs of that era became apparent, Lindsay's moralism seems less alluring and his managerial failings seem more significant. New York's City Club (Lindsay himself was a member) complained that the mayoralty was "in the hands of people who know all about management—or its vocabulary—except how to get a job done." If Lindsay often viewed issues through a veil of abstraction aimed at impressing *The New York Times* editorial board, Daley emphasized the mundane housekeeping elements of the mayor's job which anticipated today's concern with quality of life issues. What Daley couldn't grasp was the liberal-moralist dimensions of racial politics. When Daley was confronted by Martin Luther King in 1968, he told the civil rights leader that "your goals are our goals" but offered very little in the way of either concrete changes or symbolic acknowledgment of white guilt. King was taken aback when Daley threw the ball back into his court, asking him, "What are your solutions, how do you eliminate slums and blight overnight?" When Jesse Jackson got his first audience with Daley, the mayor offered him a job as a toll-taker.

Daley had an immensely personal concern with the city, extending from everything: from individuals—it's said that he knew half of the city's forty thousand workers personally—to keeping the city clean and attractive. Today it is his son who has completed his vision of cleaning up the Chicago River for recreation.

Daley may have been dubbed a dinosaur in the 1960s, but Lindsay, the self-styled progressive, was on the wrong side of history when it came to the central issues of property and homeownership. While Daley was the champion of property-owning democracy, one of the few

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prominent Democrats in the sixties who empathized with the middle class, Lindsay was the product of a New York political culture which mixed bohemianism, upper-class pretension, and leftist ideology into a coalition of contempt for the homeowning petty bourgeoisie. Lindsay had nothing but disdain for what his administration described, and I quote, as "the ticky-tacky" homes of Archie Bunker's Queens. The first-generation homeowners of the outer boroughs, fearful that their newly acquired middle class status might be stripped from them, returned the hostility. Lindsay seemed comfortable only with those too wealthy to need to work or those unable or unwilling to work. Daley, who had emerged from the ranks of the lower middle class, always understood the importance of homeownership for those newly arrived in positions of relative prosperity. He was the favorite of those white Chicagoans who owned modest homes in the "Bungalow Belt."

The hidden issue of homeownership produced an often unexamined clash between the two American ideals—the rights of private property and the right to equality of opportunity, both essential to the American creed. Lindsay honored the American ideal of equal opportunity by using city hiring to expand black employment opportunities. But his attempts to build housing for poor, racially oppressed black families with high rates of criminality in the midst of lower middle class white neighborhoods was a threat to American ideals of private property, particularly a home safe from government depredations. Lindsay was too arrogant, too sure that his was necessarily the path of righteousness, to be a hypocrite on these matters.

But Daley, like most effective politicians, was a practiced hypocrite. He protected the property rights of white homeowners at the cost of containing even black middle class families in the festering conditions of the inner city. Daley dragged his feet on expanding homeowning opportunities for African-Americans on political grounds. There was an intense and violent opposition when a black family moved into his own neighborhood of Bridgeport in 1955; the house was dismantled almost brick by brick. And the only time he was challenged politically came in 1963 from white critics who, shortly after the Robert Taylor homes had been constructed, said he had done too much for blacks. At the time, the Robert Taylor homes were seen as a big improvement, and they were built in black congressman William Dawson's district at his request and as his reward for service to the machine. Daley won re-election that year with overwhelming black support, while losing a majority of white voters.

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A new book by photographer Wayne Miller chronicles the arrival of the people who moved into Robert Taylor. The modern viewer is struck by the still Southern character of the migrants as seen in photos of rabbits strung up across the sidewalk. Even more striking was the housing which looked like the rickety shacks that had been left behind in the Mississippi delta, except these were shacks piled up three and four stories high. These ramshackle homes were the site of innumerable fires, collapsed porches and buildings, garbage-strewn alleyways, rats rampant, an absence of indoor plumbing, disease.

Later, when they became vertical disasters, Daley's critics argued that he maliciously packed forty-thousand newly arrived African-Americans into the high-rise slum of the Robert Taylor homes. They note that "Robert Taylor construction was 'gold plated,' a gift to politically connected contractors. A licensed electrician belonging to a Daley-allied union had to be on site every time a refrigerator was plugged in." And federal money that might have gone into maintaining the vast complex was siphoned into the hands of Daley cronies who operated law firms and insurance companies. And if that wasn't bad enough, the Dan Ryan Expressway, like the Robert Taylor homes built with federal money "Daley was so good at getting," sealed the projects off from the rest of the city.

But Daley fought against high-rise buildings; "when I see my neighborhood I see all the neighborhoods of Chicago," he explained. In Washington he argued for walk-ups and row houses of the sort that other groups occupied as their first step on the housing ladder, but he was rebuffed by housing officials who insisted that only high-rises could meet federal cost concerns. In other words, if we ask if the Taylor homes were a product of Daley's racism, the answer is both *yes* and *no*.

If liberals thought high-rises were reactionary in Chicago, they found them quite progressive when Lindsay proposed to build three twenty-four-story high-rise apartment buildings in the heart of a middle class Jewish neighborhood, Forest Hills, in Queens. Black and Italian middle class areas were vehemently opposed to the project, but Lindsay assumed the Jewish liberals who had voted for him in 1965 wouldn't object, and when they did he spoke of the project's "moral imperative" and denounced the opponents as "racists"—his favorite epithet. The residents of Forest Hills, it seems, were often people who had fled from Brownsville, Crown Heights, Hunts Point, and Far Rockaway into the safety of a pleasant neighborhood, and they didn't want to have to flee again.

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Lindsay's narrow emphasis on race seems dated today. Consider the current controversy in Baltimore over an ACLU lawsuit designed to move welfare families into integrated working-to-middle-class neighborhoods in Northeast Baltimore with Section 8 vouchers. (Unsurprisingly, the ACLU lawyer who initiated the suit lives in a tony neighborhood entirely free of Section 8 tenants.)

City Council president Sheila Dixon and State Senator Joan Conway, both black representatives of Northeast Baltimore, are fighting the decision. Their city, they note, has a terrible track record in these matters. Keith Norris, a council member from the district who is also black, explains that he grew up in Park Heights and "witnessed firsthand its gradual decay. . .as a result of flawed public policy." He sees property ownership not only as an emblem of achievement but as a guarantee of social stability that is now threatened by government action.

"As a homeowner now," says Norris, "I don't want wilting property values to sap the spirit of residents. . .nor do I want to see the community used as a stage for a courtroom drama." If people are to be brought in "what must be different this time is the amount of support these families get. . .[such as] classes in home maintenance, landscaping, money management, and child care."

When I spoke to people in Northeast Baltimore, they snorted that "the government specializes in sending welfare populations into weak targets." "You won't see any welfare families sent to Roland Park," one black man snapped at me, referring to the Scarsdale-like neighborhood that resembles Rock Creek Park in the District of Columbia.

In other words, Daley's caution in these matters was more than a matter of racism, it was also—as a recent Chicago experiment with homeowners equity insurance suggests—a matter of helping lower middle class people protect their nest eggs. Derided as "black insurance" when the idea was proposed thirty years ago by the radical Saul Alinsky, homeowners equity insurance enables low-income homeowners to insure the current value of their property in order to prevent white flight. It was initially defeated by pressure from both real estate interests and black politicians, like Tim Evans, who were more concerned with maintaining black political majorities than better housing.

In the ten years since the program finally began under Daley Jr. in 1990, only ten homeowners on the Southwest Side have filed claims. Though the white population has shrunk to about 20 percent of the total (with the rest divided almost evenly between blacks and Hispanics), it is still far greater than in most surrounding areas. Perhaps most telling, property values have steadily climbed. The only catch is that

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participating residents are required to wait at least five years before a sale below the assessed value entitles them to file a claim. That catch has been crucial. Having committed to live with their new neighbors for at least a few years, many longtime white residents discovered that integration wasn't the horror they had expected.

Neighborhoods, notes *The Wall Street Journal*'s Jonathan Eig, are class as well as race-sorting mechanisms:

> The home-equity program serves as a reminder that racial integration often is a matter of economic assimilation. Many of the black families that moved in a decade ago are now enrolling in the program because they fear that the new wave of Hispanic home buyers will damage property values, and Hispanic buyers are signing up because they're not so sure about the next generation of Hispanics.

Today the older Mayor Daley looks like a man ahead of his time on a variety of issues. He had doubts not only about high-rises but also about the social programs of the 1960s. He asked, "Is poor housing the cause of murder and arson?" Similarly, long before broken-windows policing became a great success, he understood that a city has to take care of the small things to maintain its quality of life.

The Lindsayites, however, seem stuck in the past. Recently I took part in a debate at the City University of New York Graduate Center on the question of whether John Lindsay was the worst New York mayor of the twentieth century. The event doubled as a Lindsay alumni reunion so the audience was packed with Lindsayites. And here I should note that the phrase "limousine liberal" is not merely a metaphor—after the debate, as I left the auditorium to go out onto Fifth Avenue, both sides of the street were lined with long black stretch limos.

During the course of the discussion the Lindsayites replied to every disaster, from the doubling of the welfare rolls in the midst of an economic boom to the bankruptcy Lindsay's policies visited on the city, with one of two responses. The first was that Lindsay was a "compassionate man": "Why, he even cried at the death of a black colleague's father." The other was to argue that no one who wasn't a part of the administration could understand or evaluate it. "You had to be there, you had to be inside the administration" to judge it, they insisted time and again. This argument, it so happens, was the favorite of the Lindsayites' archnemesis, Archie Bunker. When Bunker's son-in-law tried to explain to Archie why Vietnam was wrong, Archie replied that "Meathead" didn't

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know "nuttin'." If you wanted to judge a war, "you had to be there" just like Archie had been there in "the big one, World War II." The Lindsayites' sanctimony had not only effectively sealed them off from learning from their failures, it had reduced them to the caricature they had once mocked.

Still, in putting Lindsay in his proper place we ought not elevate Daley beyond his. The Chicago mayor faced an impossible situation inadequately. But he wasn't nearly as bad as the critics of his time suggested, nor was he as good as nostalgists suggest. We can judge Daley senior in part by what his son has done differently in a Chicago largely shorn of both machine politics and patronage. Once the tough among cities, in the words of Lincoln Steffens, Chicago has turned soft, so to speak. Symbolically, the son has left the family's ancestral home in working-class Bridgeport, which is now slowly gentrifying, for the more cosmopolitan climes of downtown. And while Chicago still suffers from police and government corruption, both Daleys paid inordinate attention to detail. Like his father, Richard M. Daley is planting trees at every opportunity. But the son runs a far more inclusive regime.

Richard M. Daley has done far more than his father to Lindsay-like bring African-Americans into government while improving the services offered to the rapidly growing number of black homeowning neighborhoods. In 1960s terms he has co-opted the black opposition more effectively than his father ever did. Both father and son courted black ministers but Richard M. has done far more to include blacks in city pork, as when he cut African-American politicians in on the lucrative food franchises at the city-owned O'Hare Airport. And black contractors were given a sizable chunk of the action when Daley built the new police headquarters in the historically African-American neighborhood of Bronzeville. Young Daley has supported affirmative action, criticized police brutality, and subsidized church loans for social service corporations. He is now in the process of tearing down the high-rise projects his father built and then generally neglected in favor of dispersing the welfare population into low-rise walk-ups. In three terms as mayor, Daley has gone from 3 percent of the black vote in 1989 to 45 percent last year when he defeated Congressman and former Black Panther Bobby Rush in a landslide even greater than those won by his father. In short, the Daleys have adjusted to a powerful African-American political presence, and most of the black leadership has adjusted to Chicago's one-party political culture.

The "Boss's" mantra of emphasizing "loyalty, hard work, and playing by the rules" was revived for Democrats by the centrist Democratic

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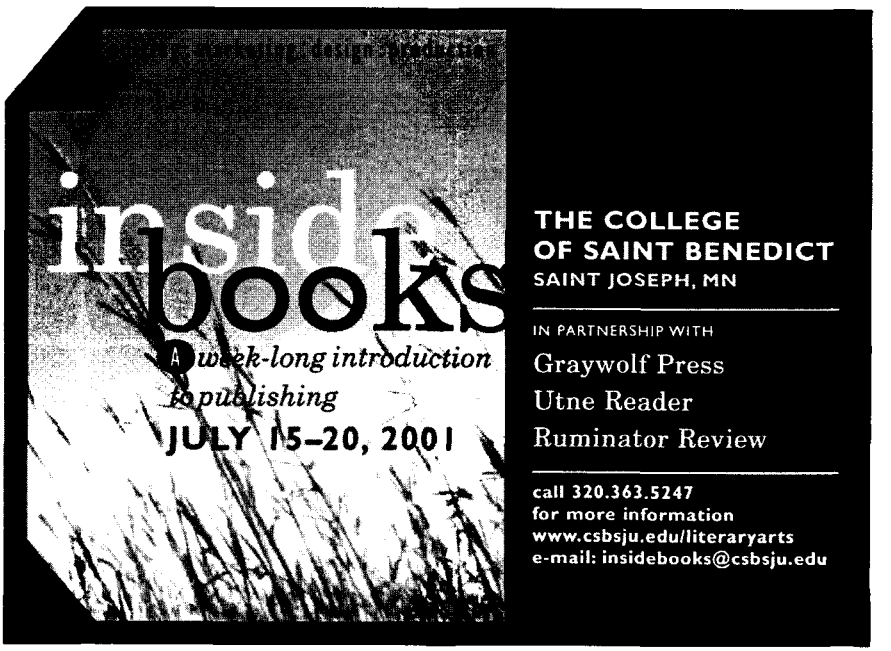
Leadership Council. The council's chair, Bill Clinton, picked up Daley's themes in his successful 1992 run for president. "Daleyism," referring to the father, was recently defined by John Judis writing in *The New Republic*, as a "cross-racial, working-class and lower middle class voting majority with the financial support of business—which is what every Democrat wants to bottle and imbibe these days." That is one reason why older brother Bill Daley ran Al Gore's campaign.

If there's merit to Richard J. Daley's revival, it's oddly enough because the elder Daley was a man behind the times. In the 1960s he was a fish out of water, a localist in an era that demanded a universalist racial ethic. But as cities have, for the most part, become more racially inclusive, they've generally been able to return to the time-honored approaches that have always worked. Daley's passion for both private homeownership and the details of city life point to the policies of today's most successful mayors. But it's only as race has receded as a defining issue that Daley's parochial perspective, which sees affirmative action as just another way of dividing the spoils, could once again define the Democrats. In Chicago, an inclusive tribalism looks remarkably similar to the multiculturalism of Jesse Jackson and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.



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MARK BAUERLEIN

Social Constructionism: Philosophy for the Academic Workplace

NOTWITHSTANDING THE DIVERSITY trumpeted by humanities departments these days, when it comes to conceptions of knowledge, one standpoint reigns supreme: social constructionism. It is a simple belief system, founded upon the basic proposition that knowledge is never true per se, but true relative to a culture, a situation, a language, an ideology, or some other social condition. Its catchphrases circulate everywhere, from committee meetings to conference programs. Truisms like "knowledge is a construct" and "there is no escaping contingency" echo in book prefaces and submission requests as if they were prerequisites to publication. Professors still waging a culture war against the Right live and work by the credo "Always historicize!" Neopragmatists, post-structuralists, Marxists, and feminists insist upon the situational basis of knowledge, taking the constructionist premise as a cornerstone of progressive thought and social reform. Graduate students mouth watchwords about subject-positions and anti-essentialism as if they were undergoing an initiation ceremony, meeting admissions requirements, and learning the tools of a trade. The standpoint functions as a party line, a tribal glue distinguishing humanities professors from their colleagues in the business school, the laboratory, the chapel, and the computing center, most of whom believe that at least some knowledge is independent of social conditions.

This is why it is a mistake to treat social constructionism as preached in the academy as a philosophy. Though the position sounds like an epistemology, filled with glib denials of objectivity, truth, and facts backed up by in-the-know philosophical citations ("As Nietzsche says. . ."), its proponents hold those beliefs most *un*philosophically. When someone holds a belief philosophically, he or she exposes it to arguments and evidence against it, and tries to mount arguments and evidence for it in return. But in academic contexts, constructionist ideas are not open for debate. They stand as community wisdom, articles of faith. When a critic submitted an essay to *PMLA* that criticized constructionists for not making arguments in their favor, the reader's report by Richard Ohmann

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rejoined that since constructionism is universally accepted by academic inquirers, there is no need to argue for it anymore. A phrase from Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* nicely encapsulates this credulousness. Referring to Foucault's argument that "Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge," she proclaims she will proceed "in accord with Foucault's demonstration, whose results I will take to be axiomatic. . . ." This is a strangely empirical language to apply to Foucault. Only those already adopting a Foucauldian outlook would judge the speculations in *The History of Sexuality* to mark a "demonstration" that yields "results." No matter how controversial are Foucault's contentions, or how frequently historians, anthropologists, and philosophers have disputed them, to Sedgwick they are axioms, starting points for inquiry. Though Sedgwick suggests that Foucault's ideas have only a provisional justification—"I will take," she says—she still places them first, and never stops to ask, *What if they are wrong?* Such constructionist notions are so ingrained in the humanities mindset that nobody bothers to substantiate them at all. Save for a few near-retirement humanists and realist philosopher holdouts, academics embrace constructionist premises as catechism learning, axioms to be assimilated before one is inducted into the professoriate. To believe that knowledge is a construct, that truth, evidence, fact, and inference all fall under the category of local interpretation, and that interpretations are more or less right by virtue of the interests they satisfy is a professional habit, not an intellectual thesis.

One can prove the institutional nature of social constructionism by noting how easy it is to question. The weakness of social constructionism as an epistemology lies in the fact that one can agree with the bare premise that knowledge is a construct, but disagree with the conclusion that objectivity is impossible and that the contents of knowledge are dependent upon the social conditions of the knower. Of course, knowledge is constructed. It must be expressed in language, composed methodically, conceived through mental views, all of which are historically derived. Constructionists extend the fact that knowledge materializes in cognitive and linguistic structures which have social determinants into the belief that knowledge has no claim to transcend them. That knowledge cannot transcend the conditions of its origination stems from the notion that cognition is never innocent, that cognition has designs and desires shaping its knowledge-building process, that knowing always has an instrumental purpose. This human dimension is local and situational, constructionists argue, a historical context

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for knowledge outside of which the knowledge has no general warrant. Even the most ahistorical kinds of knowledge, the principles of logic, mathematics, and science, have a social basis, one obscured by thinkers who have abstracted that knowledge from its rightful setting and used it for purposes of their own. Thus Martin Heidegger claims in a well-known illustration, "Before Newton's laws were discovered, they were not 'true'. . . .Through Newton the laws became true" (*Being and Time*). We only think the laws preceded Newton's conception because, Heidegger explains, that is how entities "show themselves."

But even though Newton's laws arose at a particular historical moment, in one man's mind, why assume that the laws are inextricable from that moment? There is abundant evidence for believing that the truth of Newton's laws is independent of Newton's mind, language, class, education, etc. The simple fact that persons of different languages and cultures implement those laws effectively implies their transhistorical and cross-cultural capacity. Engineers and physicists confirm the laws daily without any knowledge of Newton's circumstances. Three hundred years of experimentation and theory have altered Newton's laws only by restricting their physical purview. In short, Newton's laws have been justified in vastly different times and places. Yes, scientists and engineers have de-historicized Newtonian knowledge, pared it down to a few set principles (nobody actually reads the *Principia*). But though abstract and expedient, the laws of Newtonian physics still have a truth-value, and that value is related not to Newton's world, but to how well the laws predict outcomes, how reliably they stand up to testing, how useful they are in physical domains.

To think otherwise is to deny the distinction between the contents of knowledge and the context of their emergence. This is an old logical mistake, namely, the genetic fallacy: the confusion of a theory's discovery with its justification. Social constructionists overlook this distinction between discovery (the circumstances of a theory's origin) and justification (the establishment of its truth). To them, the idea of separating truth from origin depletes thought of its historical reality, and ultimately smacks of formalist methods and mandarin motives. Constructionists grant that the discovery/justification point may be logically correct, but in slighting historical context, it can lead to a kind of neglect, whereby the abstract consideration of theories like Newton's laws allows us to forget, say, the race, class, and gender privileges that freed Newton to excogitate upon falling bodies. Epistemologists counter by saying that historical inquiry is one thing, truth-determination is another, but for scholars raised on Foucault and Rorty, the division is never so neat and

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clear. The history of scholarship itself reveals too many instances of ideas once thought to be true later exposed as alibis for social inequities, as having more institutional-use value than abstract-truth value. Only a punctual inventory of a theory's historical entanglements has saved scholars from misusing the theory, from fomenting its implicit and perhaps malignant politics. That is the real animus behind social constructionist commitments—not a philosophical belief about knowledge, but a moral obligation to social justice.

Take another familiar example, the popular study of literary theory by Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, first published in 1983. The preface to Eagleton's readable discussion declares, "This book sets out to provide a reasonably comprehensive account of modern literary theory," and the chapter headings—"Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory," "Post-Structuralism," "Psychoanalysis"—suggest that a survey of competing schools of thought will follow. But in fact, the conceptual analysis is thin, the methodological description hasty. Instead, the book reads like a textbook case of commentary by genetic fallacy and ethical consequence. To the patient exposition of terms and concepts Eagleton prefers the oblique adumbration, as when he writes, "Leavis and Husserl both turn to the consolations of the concrete, of what can be known on the pulses, in a period of major ideological crisis [the post-World War I revolutions]." Expounding the poetics of this or that theory, Eagleton minimizes intellectual heritage and reckons ideas by their political affiliations. He attributes New Criticism to a Southern agrarian reaction to Northern industrialism, calling it "a full-blooded irrationalism, one closely associated with religious dogma. . .and with the right-wing 'blood and soil' politics of the agrarian movement." The intellectual fathers of New Critical aesthetics—Kant, Hegel, and Coleridge—play no role in this genesis. In the chapter on post-structuralism, Eagleton spends little time detailing the arguments of founding tests like "Différence," and instead strings together deconstructive platitudes—"Meaning, we might say, is thus never identical to itself"—and then summarizes, "Post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968." Again, a political context stands as source and explanation.

In turn, when assessing these theories, Eagleton focuses on their ethical results. New Critical method he reduces to "a recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo," one that licenses practitioners not to "oppose McCarthyism or further civil rights." Post-structuralism comes down to "a convenient way of

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evading such political questions [as Vietnam, Guatemala, Stalinism] altogether." How the definition of a poem as a verbal icon or as a play of signs kept one from storming the Columbia University administration building Eagleton does not say. But the fact that one could draw parallels, however factitious, between a formalist analysis that asked no political questions and a general political quietism suffices for Eagleton to indict New Criticism and deconstruction as reactionary bad faith. How one reads a poem and how one engages in political life are all of a piece. Daniel Bell may claim to be "a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture," and the art historian Anthony Blunt may have counseled students to downplay politics in their studies, all the while serving as a postwar Soviet operative in England, but ultimately, Eagleton presses, inquirers have no latitude to modulate their actions, for there is no real disjunction between scholarship and social conduct, between teaching and voting. One cannot be a progressive on issues of, say, gun control and abortion rights and a conservative in matters of scholarly method.

Literary Theory: An Introduction hardly counts as a serious discussion of literary theory, but its tactics have come to dominate humanities criticism. Commentaries on ideological origins and ethical results far exceed conceptual analyses and logical expositions. Evaluating concepts and arguments by their political backgrounds and implications has become a disciplinary wont, a pattern of inquiry. It is the natural method of constructionist epistemology, the outlook that will not distinguish between a truth and its origination, which is to say the outlook that is not really an epistemology at all. It speaks an epistemological language, but it has no epistemological principles. This is one of the curiosities of social constructionism, and why people err in attacking it on epistemological grounds, that is, on grounds of truth, evidence, and objectivity. Constructionists affirm that truth is a construct, dependent upon the conditions of its discovery. This is a flat contradiction, since truth by definition is independent of the means by which it is discovered. If constructionists mean by "truth" merely "what passes for truth," then the contradiction disappears, but now we are no longer talking about truth in epistemological terms, but in historical terms, that which is accepted as truth in this or that time and place. The acceptance of something as true is one thing, the truth of that belief is another. Establishing the latter is a routine epistemological task. Documenting the former is a traditional historical endeavor, carried out by Gibbon as well as by Sedgwick. In this distinction lies the novelty of social constructionism: in a word, constructionism disregards it, mingling history

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and epistemology, fusing what is true and what passes for true, identifying discovery with justification.

For this reason, inquirers sensitive to such distinctions accuse constructionism of philosophical confusion and methodological incorrectness. Philosopher-antagonists like John Searle and Susan Haack express contempt for the logical credentials of constructionist arguments, while conservative critics like Roger Kimball mock their sophomoric relativism. But the continued popularity of the school of thought in the academy indicates that those charges, however accurate, miss the point. They rest upon standards of coherence and clarity that constructionists delimit as themselves constructs not binding to their own way of thinking. Besides, advocates aim to convince not by their dubious logic or their relativist beliefs. They do not subscribe to any foundations except the one which rules "There are no foundations." The concepts and distinctions that opponents attack them for mishandling, social constructionists have already negated. They commit the genetic fallacy time and again, but so what? Since they define knowledge as bound to the context of its construction, the genetic fallacy is not a mistake—it is a policy.

The real questions to put to social constructionists are not those of truth, but of tactics. Acknowledging the irrelevance of philosophical disputes, we must ask: If canons of logic do not apply to constructionist thinking, on what does it base its assertions? If all knowledge is bound by time and place, how does constructionist persuasion work outside *its* time and place? If discovery and justification are one, how does constructionist inquiry justify itself?

One answer may be found in the rhetorical patterns of constructionist statements. Because constructionist maxims are decreed so ritualistically in academic discourse, they tend to assume a customary verbal form, one whose import is often borne by seemingly non-substantive words and locutions. For example, in the following two citations, notice the word "surely." First, in a roundtable discussion on evidence in *PMLA* (1996), Stephen Orgel comments, "Surely historical evidence depends on interpretation. Even scientific evidence does." Second, in a *Christian Science Monitor* review of a book on the acceleration of modern life, Tom Regan writes, "*Faster* [the book under review] will help us think about the way we 'construct' time—for it surely is a construct" (August 26, 1999). Time and evidence are the main objects in these sentences, but "surely" does most of the work. That historical and scientific evidence are interpretive and that time is a construct are, to say the least, complicated propositions. But the "surely" rules out any clarification or debate, and does so not on logical or definitional grounds, but

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on the grounds of the unfaltering surety of the speakers. "Surely" signifies not a premise or a piece of evidence, but an attitude. Orgel and Regan believe in what they say, and believe in it with certainty. Added to each proposition is a state of mind, an assurance that disallows objection. Marking the statements as dubitable only by wrongheaded people, "surely" automatically dismisses those who believe otherwise. Anybody who disagrees with the propositions faces the task of refuting them *and* surmounting the certitude of Orgel and Regan.

This excess of confidence is a key to social constructionist argumentation. The "surely" here is an explicit instance of the tacit, blank temerity of expression typical of the idiom. Given the breadth of constructionist ideas, proponents might submit them tentatively as speculations, hypotheses, or opinions, but in fact, this spirited confidence phrases them as bare simplicities whose contradiction is intellectually indefensible, and perhaps politically motivated. The aplomb turns the issue from the truth or falsity of the premises to the mindset of the antagonists. Since no enlightened mind would doubt the premises, dissent from them can only stem from the wrongheadedness of the dissenters. As the intentions of the other side come under scrutiny, the premises themselves remain untouched. A philosophical quarrel becomes a psychological speculation. Consider, for example, how these two statements take constructionist ideas for granted, and cast doubt on the temper of those who do not:

> . . .nothing in today's colleges seems to have enraged traditionalists more than the idea of the contingency of knowledge.

> For after all, the pragmatist believes in the sufficiency of human practices and is not dismayed when those practices are shown to be grounded in nothing more (or less) than their own traditions and histories; the impossibility of tying our everyday meanings and values to meanings and values less local does not lead the pragmatist to suspect their reality, but to suspect the form of thought that would deny it.

The first citation, by Paul Lauter, comes from an afterword to the instructor's guide to *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, in which Lauter reflects upon the canon, undergraduate education, and the contingent status of knowledge. Nowhere in the piece does Lauter demonstrate the contingency premise, nor does he mention any arguments

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against it. He simply assumes the former and pigeonholes anti-contingency responses as rage. Again, the opponent's attitude substitutes for his reasoning, and because rage implies helplessness, Lauter's characterization suggests that there is no valid reason to counter the contingency premise. That someone would deny contingency dispassionately on epistemological grounds is out of the question.

The second citation, by Stanley Fish, appears in the afterword to a collection of essays on neopragmatism, and recites the same shift from philosophical debate to psychological inspection. The remarkable thing about the passage is how breezily Fish affirms this bullying maneuver. First, he asserts the impossibility of meanings and values transcending their locale. This "no transcendence" thesis is a logical necessity and/or an empirical given, period. Next, anybody who fails to recognize this fact is not just mistaken or confused, his entire "form of thought" is "suspect." When challenged by those who think that local meanings and values are "unreal," Fish's pragmatist does not counterargue *for* the reality of local meanings and values, but instead wonders whether his antagonist is ideologically blinded or psychologically disabled.

What could lead otherwise responsible academics to implement such narrow-minded, accusatory, cocksure tactics when it comes to constructionist ideas? How has constructionism licensed inquirers to abandon protocols of debate, specifically, the civility that requires learned combatants to listen to each other? Constructionist notions have become so patent and revered that their articulation need no longer happen, except as reminders to professors who stray from the party line (many utterances begin with "We must remember that. . ."). Those who raise objections soon find themselves trapped in debates shaped by us versus them forensics, enunciated in an idiom of brazen philosophical avowals and insinuations about the character of adversaries. Nonconstructionists feel not so much refuted, as ostracized. The humanities become a closed society, captive to a weak epistemology with a mighty elocution.

This polarizing, personalizing rhetoric indicates that social constructionism has an institutional basis, not a philosophical, moral, or political one. It tramples on philosophical distinctions and practices an immoral mode of debate. Though it declares a political goal for criticism, it is not a political stance, for no political movement has issued from constructionist thinking. It has won few converts outside literature and "studies" departments, much less outside the university walls. Instead, what has emerged from social constructionism is not a philosophical school or a political position, but an institutional product,

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specifically, an outpouring of research publications, conference talks, and classroom presentations by subscribers. For many who have entered the humanities as teachers and researchers, social constructionism has been a liberating and serviceable implement of work, a standpoint that has enhanced the productivity of professors. It has provided academics with axioms and assurances necessary to their labors. Herein lies the secret of constructionism's success: the critical method that follows from constructionist premises has proven eminently conducive to the exigencies of teaching, lecturing, and publishing. In a word, it is the school of thought most congenial to current professional workplace conditions of scholars in the humanities.

The most obvious advantage constructionism provides lies in its territorial nature, for by undermining truth and objectivity, constructionism bolsters the humanities as an academic whole, carving out a space in the university for practices of interpretation and subjectivity. One can witness this turf function in critiques by literary and cultural theorists of their institutional competitors—the scientists. This cultural critique of science often goes by the name of "science studies," a project directed at the political subtleties of scientific practices—for example, the presence of ideologically charged metaphors in scientific discourse. Its goal is to reveal science itself as a construct, one especially dangerous in that it casts scientificity as neutral and *non*-constructed. The institutional goal of science studies is to delimit the sciences to one knowledge domain, to show that they speak not for reality, but for certain constructions of reality. If the university is to reflect the different knowledges of the universe, then containing the purview of scientific knowledge to empirical practice preserves the humanities as a distinct way of knowing.

But while the defensive position of the humanities in the university promotes the use of social constructionism as a stock in trade, in fact, the pressures favoring constructionism are often more quotidian and prosaic than that of arts versus science competition. They affect professors individually, not as representatives of a department or an outlook; I mean the circumstances of graduate student aid, grant-giving, job-hiring, tenure, leave time, teaching load, and salary increases. Professors and graduate students have papers to grade, lectures to prepare, applications to evaluate, books to read, undergraduates to meet, and most importantly, essays and chapters to write. Their success rests in how well they handle students, maintain collegiality, and meet research expectations, with wellness frequently being measured by the number of students they attract, the number of committees on which they serve,

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and the number and girth of publications they produce. A school of thought whose practice accords neatly with the times and money, numbers and paperwork of academic labor becomes a material resource, especially in a field trading words and ideas. If the methods of research and argument that follow from a set of terms and principles fit the schedules and competitions of professional life, subscribing to them marks an intellectual belief *and* a career decision.

At first sight, this attribution of an intellectual standpoint to institutional demands may appear reductive and tenuous. The hypothesis denigrates the reasons academics believe in this or that system and forecloses questions such as that of the genetic fallacy. But the goal here is to explain the popularity of constructionism, not its truth. Social constructionism as academic common sense needs to be analyzed. One prefers an institutional explanation to an intellectual one because this school of thought has settled into a critical dogma and adopted ad hominem tactics. Indeed, it is the fact that questions like the genetic fallacy one are *not* deliberated openly, that the cards are all stacked in favor of a constructionist answer, that makes one wonder about the state of the institution in which they are posed. When a school of thought has become so popular that it succeeds without really trying, it is time to interrogate the polity supporting it. The thing to do is to find concrete institutional situations that uncover how social constructionism helps professors function within academe.

One of the more intense and complicated moments of academic life is the tenure meeting. There, behind closed doors, senior faculty decide the fate of a junior colleague. The candidate looks upon the decision as a do-or-die threshold, with success meaning security for life, failure meaning years of scrapping at adjunct posts, or expulsion from the teaching ranks forever. Senior faculty regard their vote as a vote on the livelihood of a colleague, in comparison to which any objections they have to the record shrink to pettiness. Outside reviewers asked to evaluate the research materials all too often treat their task with obvious distaste, sending to the department perfunctory letters filled with the standard clichés about brilliance and potential. Administrators oversee each step of the process with one question in mind: "How will this look in a courtroom, or in a *Lingua Franca* article?" Economic hardship, legal fears, professor burnout, and personal feelings all conspire to make the tenure meeting a dreadful affair, in which supporters overpraise and sentimentalize the candidate while critics descend into a surly skepticism. Meanwhile, the candidate huddles in a paranoid freeze, six

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years of graduate school and six years of junior teaching adjudicated by a two-hour colloquy down the hall.

Of course, people and institutions always find ways of coping. Of late, at many universities senior faculty and administrators have discovered a mechanism that frees the decision-makers of responsibility and isolates for the aspirant *the* hurdle for advancement: the book. As long as the candidate proves an inoffensive teacher and a reasonable department member, only one question sits on the meeting room table: Is the research project finished? If the junior colleague has a book in hand or an acceptance letter from the director of a university press, tenure is a fait accompli. If the work remains in manuscript, promising but incomplete, no promotion. That is the employment equation. Tenure has boiled down to a six-year composition scheme. Junior faculty now face a demystified production schedule, and senior faculty enter the tenure meeting with a one-checkbox form in their heads. No more messy discussions about quality. No more anxiety about whether the department has enough discernment, or too much. Administrators have an objective criterion to point to should any outsiders challenge the proceedings. Judgment has been externalized, handed over to university editorial boards. The assistant professor has inherited a job task that takes priority over teaching students, that is, marketing his revised dissertation to academic press editors.

While the book criterion has clarified the tenure process, it has fundamentally altered the nature of scholarship in the humanities. The system discourages research that is time-consuming, that involves tracking down information secreted in libraries and archives, that may yield numerous dead ends before a discovery occurs. Junior faculty must envision book-length projects that can be executed well in advance of the crucial tenure meeting, which takes place in the middle of the candidate's sixth year of employment. With university presses sometimes taking two years to decide upon a manuscript, pre-tenure scholars have three and a half years from the time of their hiring to complete their opus. Books that require lengthier inquiries do not get written. Recent hirees acclimating themselves to a new campus, building up their teaching repertoire, and learning the ropes of department service do not have time to bury themselves in manuscript collections or to pursue dubious trails of evidence. Clear-sighted professors will avoid empirical methods, aware that it takes too much time to verify propositions about culture, to corroborate facts with multiple sources, to consult primary documents, and to compile evidence adequate to inductive conclusions. They will seek out research models whose premises are already in place,

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not in need of proof, and whose exercise proceeds without too much deliberation over inquiry guidelines. Speculation will prevail over fact-finding, theory and politics over erudition. Inquirers will limit their sources to a handful of primary texts and broach them with a popular academic theory or through a sociopolitical theme. In sum, facing a process that issues in either lifetime security or joblessness, junior faculty will relax their scruples and select a critical practice that fosters their own professional survival, a practice that offers timely shortcuts to publication and still enjoys institutional sanction.

Social constructionism is one such expedient method. It has widespread support in the humanities, and so practitioners need waste no paragraphs validating it. It scoffs at empirical notions, chastising them as "naive positivism" and freeing scholars from having to prove the truth of constructionist premises and generalizations. It lightens the evidentiary load, affirming that an incisive reading of a single text or event is sufficient to illustrate a theoretical or historical generality. Objectivity as an ideal collapses, for while objectivity requires that one acknowledge opposing arguments and refute them on logical or empirical grounds, constructionism merely asks that inquirers position themselves as a subject in relation to other subject-positions. True, constructionism proposes to study phenomena as historical constructs, a proposal entailing a method of enumerating historical particulars and their convergence in this or that object. But in fact, constructionist analysis typically breaks the object down into theoretical, political, and (a few) historical constituents, most of which are common currency in academic parlance. In analyzing the text or event as a construct, inquirers suspend the whole question of the reality of the thing and the truth of the construction. All that counts is the particular version of the thing, and with no objective standard by which to measure the version, the laborious process of justification dissolves.

Last month a scholarly journal asked me to assess a submission on Jacques Lacan's adoption of certain semiotic principles of Charles Sanders Peirce. After reading the essay, I recommended publication, but added that Lacan largely misconstrued Peirce's arguments and that the author needed to discuss the misrepresentations. He replied that whether Lacan was right or wrong was beside the point. He was only interested in how Lacan "appropriated" Peirce. To focus on whether Lacan understood Peirce correctly would sway the discussion from Lacan's creative uses of Peircean ideas, he said. Of course, the author's defense was epistemologically dubious, but it was institutionally beneficial. Although it put the author in the position of purveying Lacan's

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misconstruction of Peirce uncritically, it simplified his task enormously, saving him the trouble of checking Lacan's appropriations against Peirce's voluminous, difficult corpus. If only conservative evaluators would agree to the constructedness of Lacan's notions, not their truth, then the essay could proceed to publication.

Apologias like this one are rampant in the humanities, and the books and articles that they enable flood the scholarly marketplace. University press catalogues, booknotes and ads in periodicals, and "list of contributors" pages in journals announce these publications as breakthough efforts and necessary reading, but despite the praise, most of them soon disappear into the library stacks never to be heard from again. They are hastily conceived and predictably argued, and notwithstanding the singularity promised on their dust jackets, they are all of a type. They begin with approved constructionist premises, bolster them with arguments from authority ("According to Richard Rorty. . ."), and attach them to standard generalities about power, race, and gender. They vary only in their subject matter, the texts and events selected for commentary. They also suffer from the stylistic and design flaws characteristic of scholarship pushed into production too quickly. Last year, I read six book-length manuscripts for university presses, five of them by junior faculty. All five I returned to the press with detailed instructions for developmental editing. The authors possessed considerable intelligence and earnest motives, but they obviously tried to compose too fast. Sentences were unpolished and contained uniform expressions. Transitions were jumpy and casual, as if the chapters succeeded one another with "Now, let's look at. . . ." The introductions were elliptical and rambling, as if the authors had not yet settled the question of what concerns the projects were aimed at resolving.

But however rough and incoherent, such manuscripts often make it into print and the authors win promotions. This is the research result of the productivity requirements of the profession. Junior faculty scramble to get dissertations published before their time, and the market is saturated with scholarly ephemera. Younger humanities professors no longer spend ten years investigating a subject, sharpening their theses, and refining their prose. Lengthy archival studies and careful erudite readings no longer appear. Career trajectories of figures like René Girard, M. H. Abrams, Paul de Man, and Meyer Shapiro are eschewed, for none of those talents produced enough work early in their professional lives to merit tenure under the present system. Penalized for selecting long-term projects, assistant professors have too little time to embark upon studies such as *The Mirror and the Lamp*.

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This book-for-tenure requirement affects professors at the top fifty to seventy-five research institutions alone, but the general trend it represents—the acceleration of scholarship—reaches into all areas of academic life. Whenever faculty observe annual salary increases tied to their productivity for the year, and whenever graduate students face tuition support packages due to expire after four years, they will opt for a method of inquiry that ensures their professional livelihood. Whenever academic press editors favor topical culture studies over archival research, ambitious scholars will follow practices that help them keep pace with intellectual current events. Whenever hiring committees and funding agencies emphasize their interest in innovative, non-traditional forms of inquiry, applicants will fashion themselves accordingly, mindful of the ever more tenuous line between the avant-garde and the old hat. In each case, a commitment to painstaking induction and catholic learning proves disastrous.

This is the bare and banal advantage of social constructionism: it saves time. Truth, facts, objectivity—those require too much reading, too many library visits, too much time soliciting interlibrary loan materials, scrolling through microfilm records, double-checking sources, and looking beyond academic trends that come and go. A philosophy that discredits the foundations of such time-consuming research is a professional blessing. It is the belief-system of inquirers who need an alibi for not reading the extra book, traveling to the other archives, or listening to the other point of view. This is why constructionism is the prevailing creed in the humanities today. It is the epistemology of scholarship in haste, of professors under the gun. As soon as the humanities embraced a productivity model of merit, empiricism and erudition became institutional dead ends, and constructionism emerged as the method of the fittest. Scholars may have initially embraced constructionism as a philosophical position, but the evolution of constructionism into a brash institutional maneuvering indicates that it now functions as a response to a changing labor environment. How unfortunate that humanities faculty did not fight back against the productivity standard as soon as it arose and insist that scholars need time to read, time to reflect, time to test ideas in the classroom and at conferences if they are to come up with anything lasting. What a shame that they were able to concoct a mode of thought that cooperated with the quantification system, a plan of survival that now stands as the academic wisdom of the age.

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IVO ANDRIĆ

A Letter from 1920

MARCH OF 1920. The railroad station in Slavonski Brod. Past midnight. The wind blowing from an undefined direction seems colder and stronger than it really is to the weary travelers longing for sleep. High above, stars pass among the stirred clouds. Far away, yellow and red lights move faster and slower along the invisible tracks, along with the piercing sound of the conductors' whistles or drawn-out howling of the locomotives into which we, the passengers, bring the melancholy of our tiredness and the gloom of our long, sullen waiting.

In front of the station, next to the first train track, we sit on our suitcases and wait for the train of which we know neither the arrival nor the departure time; the only thing we do know is that it will be crowded, stuffed with passengers and luggage.

The man sitting next to me is an old friend I'd lost track of for the last five or six years. He is Maks Levenfeld, a doctor and a doctor's son. He was born and raised in Sarajevo. His father had left Vienna as a young doctor and settled in Sarajevo, where he organized a large practice. They are of Jewish descent but have long since converted to Christianity. His mother was born in Trieste, the daughter of an Italian baroness and an Austrian naval officer, descendant of French emigrants. In Sarajevo, two generations of people remember her figure, her gait, and her elegant dressing style. She had the kind of beauty that even the most insolent and the most vulgar people watched with a respect and regard they did not usually demonstrate.

We attended high school together in Sarajevo, except that he was three classes my senior, which was considerable at that age.

I remember vaguely that I had noticed him as soon as I began school. He was in the fourth grade at the time, but still dressed as a child. He was a strong boy, a *Švapče*, in a navy blue sailor suit with anchors embroidered at the corners of the wide sailor collar. He still wore shorts. On his feet he wore perfectly shaped shallow black shoes. Between the short white socks and his short pants—naked strong calves, ruddy and already dotted with light hairs.

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At the time, no contact existed or could have existed between us. Everything separated us: age, looks and habits, material circumstances, and the social status of our parents.

But I remember him much better at a later point, when I was in the fifth grade and he was in the eighth. By that time he was already a lanky young man with light eyes showing unusual sensitivity and great vivaciousness of spirit, well but carelessly dressed, with thick blond hair that constantly fell in strong, restless whips, now from one then the other side of his face. We met and became closer during some discussions led by a group of senior boys in the park on a bench.

There were no limits and no considerations, all the principles were shifted, and the foundations of whole spiritual worlds were mined with bombastic words. Everything would, of course, return back to its place afterwards, but those passionate words were significant for us and for the destiny that awaited us, as a certain foretelling of great feats of the fighting times and the painful perplexities that were about to come.

When I left for home after one of our lively discussions, quivering from excitement and convinced of my triumph (as much as my adversary in the discussion), Maks joined me. That was the first time the two of us had been alone. It flattered me and uplifted my winner's elation as well as my self-esteem. He asked what I was reading and watched me carefully as if seeing me for the first time in his life. I answered in excitement. He suddenly stopped, looked me straight in the eye and said in an oddly calm manner: "You know, I wanted to tell you that you've misquoted Ernst Haeckel."

I felt my face blushing and the earth slowly shifting beneath my feet before returning to its original position. Of course I had misquoted; my quotation had come from some cheap brochure, remembered with uncertainty and, probably, badly translated. All my triumph turned into a pang of conscience and feeling of shame. The light blue eyes watched me without compassion but also without the slightest trace of malice or superiority. And Maks repeated my unfortunate quote in the correct form. And when we arrived in front of his beautiful house on the bank of Miljacka, he shook my hand forcefully and invited me to visit him the following afternoon to see his books.

That afternoon was an experience for me. I saw the first real library in my life and it was clear to me that I was looking at my destiny. Maks had many German and some Italian and French books that belonged to his mother. He showed me all this with a calm that I envied more than the books. It was not envy exactly, but a feeling of limitless satisfaction, and an immense desire that I might one day move so freely through this

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world of books from which, so it seemed to me, shone light and warmth. He himself spoke as if he were reading from a book, freely, and he moved without bragging in that world of glorious names and great ideas, while I quivered with excitement, with vanity, shyly entering this world of great men, fearing the world I had left outside and into which I had to return.

These afternoon visits with my older friend continued and became more frequent. I suddenly improved my German, I started reading Italian. I even brought home, to my poor apartment, beautifully bound old books. I fell behind in my school studies. Everything I read looked to me like the sacred truth and my sublime duty, from which I could not wrench myself if I did not want to lose my self-respect and all my self-confidence. I knew only one thing: all those books had to be read, and such or similar things needed to be written. I had not thought of anything else in life.

I remember one day in particular. It was the month of May. Maks was preparing for his final exams, but without excitement or noticeable effort. He led me to a small separated bookcase on which golden letters said: *Helios Klassiker—Ausgabe*. And I remember him telling me the bookcase was bought along with the books. To me even the bookcase looked sacred and its wood imbued with light. Maks took out a volume of Goethe and begun reading *Prometheus*.

He began with some new, previously, at least to me, unknown voice, and it was obvious he had read that poem an infinite number of times:

> Cover thy heavens, Zeus,
> With clouds of mist,
> And, as a senseless child
> Who lops the thistles' heads,
> Try your strength with oaks and mountains;
>
> Yet, leave
> The earth of mine
> In my cottage, not raised by thee,
> Leave my hearth,
> Whose glow
> You envy!

At the end, he rhythmically but forcefully pounded the arm of the chair he was sitting in with his fist; his hair fell on both sides of his flushed face.

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Here sit I, creating mortals
After my own image,
A race similar to me,
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy, to be glad,
And, as I,
not to look back upon you!

That was the first time I had seen him like that. I listened with awe and a slight fear. Then we went outside and continued our conversation about the poem in the warm dusk. Maks saw me to my steep street and then I walked him to the river bank again, then back to the street, and back again to the bank.

The night caught on and fewer people were around, but we nevertheless covered the same route, discussing the meaning of life and the origins of gods and men. I remember one moment exceptionally well. The first time we reached my homely street and stopped at some gray wooden fences, Maks stretched out his left hand in a strange way and said to me in a sort of warm, confidential voice: "You know, I'm an atheist."

A thick clump of elder was blooming above the tumbled-down fence, spreading its strong, heavy scent which came to me as the scent of life itself. The evening was solemn, all around us was quiet, and the dome of heaven above me, full of stars, seemed new to me. I was so excited I did not know what to say. I only felt that something important had happened between me and my older friend and that now we could not simply part and go to our separate homes. That is how we went on strolling until late into the night.

Maks's graduation separated us. He left for Vienna to study medicine. We wrote to each other for a short while but the letter writing somehow petered out. We sometimes saw one another during breaks, but without the former closeness. And then came the war, separating us completely.

And now, after several years, we met, again, at this ugly and boring station. We had traveled from Sarajevo to Slavonski Brod on the same train, but did not know it and we saw one another only then on the platform waiting for the uncertain arrival of the Belgrade train.

In a few words we told one another how we spent the war years. He graduated in the first year of the war, and went as a doctor to all the Austrian fronts, always serving in Bosnian regiments. During the war his father died of typhus fever and his mother left Sarajevo and moved

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to her relatives' home in Trieste. Maks had spent the last few months in Sarajevo, just long enough to put his affairs in order. In agreement with his mother he had sold his old father's house on the Miljacka and most of his things. Now he was on his way to his mother in Trieste and then he might go on to Argentina, perhaps even to Bolivia. He did not declare it openly, but it was clear he was leaving Europe for ever.

Maks had grown larger during his life on the front, had roughened; he was dressed like a businessman, as far as I could tell. In the darkness I could just make out his strong head with thick blond hair and hear his voice, which had become deeper, more masculine over the years, and his Sarajevo dialect, with its softened consonants and its blurry drawn-out vowels. His language gave out a certain feeling of insecurity.

He spoke, even now, as if he were reading from a book, using many unusual, bookish, learned phrases. But that was all that remained of the former Maks. Otherwise, there was no reminder of either poetry or books. (Nobody remembered *Prometheus* any more.) At first he said something about the war in general, with a great bitterness, more in the tone of voice than in the words—a bitterness that did not expect to be understood. For him, there were no opposing fronts, so to speak, in this great war; they had mixed, flowed one into the other and utterly merged. The general suffering had veiled his vision and deprived him of an understanding of everything else. I remember how shocked I was when he said he congratulated the victors—and that he pitied them deeply, because the conquered saw where they stood and what they had to do, while the conquerors could not even suspect what was ahead of them. He spoke in the caustic and hopeless tone of a man who has lost a lot and can therefore now say what he pleases, knowing very well that no one can harm him for it nor will saying it help him any. After that great war there were many such embittered men among the intelligentsia, embittered in a peculiar way, about something indefinable in life. These people could find in themselves neither the ability to reconcile and adapt, nor the power for firm decisions in the opposite direction. He was, it seemed to me at the moment, one of those people.

But our conversation halted quickly, because neither of us wanted to quarrel that night, after so many years, at this place for a reunion. That is why we spoke of other things. Actually, he spoke. Even now, he spoke in carefully chosen words and complicated sentences, as a man who spends more time with books than with people, coldly and matter-of-factly—without hesitating and embellishing, just as when one opens a medical textbook and finds in it the symptoms of his own illness.

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I offered him a cigarette, but he said he did not smoke, and he said it in haste, almost as if with fear and disgust. And while I lit one cigarette after another, he talked with a sort of forced nonchalance, as if driving away other, heavier thoughts: "So, the two of us made it to the first mainline station and that means: we are holding on to the doorknob of the door leading into the wide world. We are leaving Bosnia. I will never come back, but you will."

"Who knows?" I interrupt pensively, urged by that particular conceit with which young people like to see their destiny in faraway lands and unusual paths.

"No, no, you will definitely come back," says my companion confidently as if making a diagnosis, "and I will be struggling with memories of Bosnia for the rest of my life, as with some Bosnian disease. What the cause of it is, I do not even know myself—the fact that I was born and grew up in Bosnia, or that I will never be coming back again. It doesn't matter."

In an odd place, at an odd time, even the conversation becomes odd, a little like a dream. I look sideways at the large, hunched silhouette of my former friend next to me and wonder; I think how little he resembles that young man who pounded with his fist and recited: "Cover thy heavens! . . ." I think about what will happen to us if life continues to change us so quickly and so deeply, I think that only the changes we notice in ourselves are good and right. And while I think about all that, I suddenly notice that my friend is speaking again. Roused from my thoughts, I listen to him carefully. So carefully it seems to me that all those station noises around me have died out and that only his voice murmurs in the windy night.

"Yes, for the longest time I really thought that I would, just like my father, spend my life treating children in Sarajevo and that my bones, just like his, would rest at the cemetery in Kosovo. What I saw and experienced in the Bosnian regiments during the war shook this conviction, but when I left the army this summer and spent three months in Sarajevo, it became clear to me that I wouldn't be able to stay and live there. And the mere thought of living in Vienna, Trieste, or any other Austrian city, revolts me, revolts me to the point of nausea. And that's why I began thinking about South America."

"All right, but may one ask what it is that is making you run away from Bosnia?" I asked with the recklessness at the time typical of people my age asking questions.

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"Well, 'one may ask,' only one isn't likely to get a concise answer in passing at a railroad station. But if I nevertheless had to say in one word what it is that's driving me out of Bosnia, I would say: hatred."

Maks suddenly stood up, as if he had hit an invisible fence in his speech. And I surfaced to the reality of the cold night at the railroad station in Slavonski Brod. The wind was getting stronger and colder, lights shimmered and passed at a distance, tiny locomotives whistled. Above us, even the tiny piece of the sky with scarce stars had disappeared, and only fog and smoke made a blanket worthy of these flatlands where, it seemed to me, man sank deep into the black, rich soil.

All of a sudden, I felt an angry and pestering desire to refute his claim, even though it was not sufficiently clear or understandable. Both of us were quiet and confused. Silence lay heavy between us in the night, and it was not possible to predict which one of us would speak first.

At that instant we heard the roar of an express train from the distance, immediately followed by its heavy whistle, muffled, as if coming out of a concrete tunnel. The entire station instantly came to life. Hundreds of previously invisible figures rose in the darkness and began running towards the train. The two of us jumped up as well, but the crowd that we fell into separated us more and more. I only managed to shout my Belgrade address.

About three weeks later, in Belgrade, I received a hefty letter. I could not recognize the large handwriting. It was Maks writing to me from Trieste, in German.

My dear, old friend,

During our accidental encounter in Slavonski Brod, our conversation was chopped and difficult. And even had we had a much better opportunity and more time, I don't believe we would have understood each other and cleared everything. The unexpected meeting and abrupt departure made it completely impossible. I'm getting ready to leave Trieste, where my mother is living. I'm leaving for Paris, where I have some relatives on my mother's side. If I'm allowed, as a foreigner, to start a medical practice there, I'll stay in Paris; if not, I'm really going to South America.

I don't believe these few disconnected paragraphs that I'm writing in haste will be able to completely explain the matter and justify in your eyes my "running away" from Bosnia. I'm sending them anyway, because I feel that I owe you an answer and because, remembering our school days, I don't want you to misunderstand me and see in me just a

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Kraut and "carpetbagger" who lightly leaves the country he was born in at the very moment it is beginning a free life, and needs all possible strength.

Let me get to the point right away. Bosnia is a wonderful country, fascinating, with nothing ordinary in its nature and its people. And just as there are mineral riches underneath the earth in Bosnia, so undoubtedly the Bosnian man hides within himself many moral values rarely found in his compatriots in other Yugoslav lands. But you see, there is one thing that people in Bosnia, at least people of your kind, should see and never lose sight of: Bosnia is a land of hatred and fear. But let's leave aside the fear, which is only a correlative of this hatred, its natural echo, and talk about hatred. Yes, about hatred. And you instinctively wince and protest when you hear this word (I saw it that night at the station), just as every one of you resists hearing it, grasping it and understanding it. But it is precisely what should be seen, established, and analyzed. And the real harm is in the fact that no one either wants or is capable of doing it. Because the fatal characteristic of this hatred is in the fact that the Bosnian man isn't aware of the hatred that lives in him, abhors analyzing it, and hates anyone who tries to do it. But still, the fact is: there are more people in Bosnia and Herzegovina willing to kill or be killed in the fits of this subconscious hatred, because of different causes and under different pretexts, than in other bigger Slavic or non-Slavic lands.

I know that hatred, just like anger, has its function in the development of society, because hatred provides strength, and anger provokes action. There are ancient and deeply rooted injustices and abuses that only floods of hatred and anger can uproot and wash away. And when these floods subside and disappear, there is room for freedom, for the creation of a better life. Contemporaries see hatred and anger much better, because they suffer from them, but their descendants will only see the fruits of strength and action. I know this well. But what I've seen in Bosnia, that was something different. That was hatred, but not limited just to some such moment in the course of social development and an inevitable part of a historical process; rather, it was hatred that exhibits itself as an independent force, that finds its purpose in itself. Hatred that sets man against man and then throws them into equal misery and misfortune or drives both adversaries into the grave; hatred that like a cancer in an organism consumes and eats away everything around it, only to perish with it in the end, because such hatred, like a flame, doesn't have a permanent form nor a life of its own; it is merely a weapon of

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the instinct of destruction or self-destruction, merely as such it exists, and it only exists until it completes its mission of total destruction.

Yes, Bosnia is a land of hatred. That's Bosnia. And by an odd contrast, that isn't really that odd, and could perhaps by careful analysis be easily explained, it could also be said that there are few countries with such firm belief, elevated strength of character, so much gentleness and loving ardor, such depth of feeling, devotion and steady loyalty, such thirst for justice. But in unseen depths beneath all this hide burning hatreds, entire hurricanes of tethered and compressed hatreds, maturing and waiting their turn. Between your loves and your hatred the relationship is the same as between your high mountains and the thousand times larger and invisible geological layers on which they rest. And so, you are condemned to live on deep layers of explosives which ignite from time to time precisely by the sparks of those loves of yours and your fiery and violent emotions. Perhaps your greatest misfortune lies in the fact that you do not even suspect how much hatred there is in your loves and your passions, traditions and pieties. And just as the soil on which we live, under the influence of the atmospheric humidity and warmth, passes into our bodies and gives them color and appearance, and decides on the character and direction of our way of life and behavior—in the same manner the immense, underground, and invisible hatred on which the Bosnian man lives, enters unnoticed and in a roundabout way into all of his, even the best, acts. Vices give birth to hatred all over the world, because they spend and do not create, destroy and do not build, but in countries such as Bosnia, even the virtues often speak and act through hatred. With you, ascetics derive no love from their asceticism, but hatred for the voluptuary instead; the sober hate those who drink, and a killing-hatred towards the entire world appears in the drunkards. Those who believe and love, hate to death those who do not believe or those who believe differently and love other things. And, unfortunately, often the principal part of their belief and their love is consumed in that hatred. (The most evil and sinister faces can be seen in greatest numbers at places of worship—monasteries and dervish tekkes.) Those who oppress and exploit the economically weaker, bring into it the hatred, which makes the exploitation a hundred times harder and uglier, and those who suffer injustices dream of justice and revenge, but as some revengeful explosion which, if it were to come true according to their plan, would have to be of such shape and magnitude it would blow to pieces the oppressed along with the hated oppressor. You Bosnians have, for the most part, got used to keeping all the strength of hatred for that which is closest to you. Your holy of holies is, as a rule,

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behind three hundred rivers and mountains, but the objects of your disgust and hatred are here, next to you, in the same village, often on the opposite side of the wall of your backyard. So your love remains inert, but your hate is spurred into action easily. You even love your native land, you fervently love it, but in three or four different ways which cancel each other out, hate one another to death, and often clash.

In one of Maupassant's stories there is a Dionysian description of spring which ends with the remark that on such days there should be a warning posted on every corner: "Citizens! It is springtime, beware of love!" Perhaps in Bosnia men should be warned at every step, in their every thought and their every feeling, even the most elevated, to beware of hatred—innate, unconscious, endemic hatred. Because this poor, backward country, in which four different faiths live closely bound together, needs four times more love, mutual understanding and tolerance than other countries. But in Bosnia, on the contrary, misunderstanding, which from time to time crosses into open hatred, is almost the general characteristic of its people. The abyss between the different faiths is so deep that only hatred sometimes manages to cross it. I know that you could argue, and with sufficient reason, that a certain progress in that direction can be seen, that the ideas of the nineteenth century have left their impact here, too, and that now, after the liberation and unification, everything will go much better and faster. I'm afraid it is not completely so. (It seems to me that, in these past few months, I have seen very well the real relationships between people of different faiths and nationalities in Sarajevo!) On every occasion it will be said: "Your brother is dear, regardless of his religion!" or "It matters not how one crosses himself, it is whose blood warms his heart," "Honor what is not yours, and be proud of yours," "Integral national unity does not know religious or tribal differences." But in Bosnian urban life there has always been plenty of fake courtesy, wise deception of oneself and others by resounding words and empty ceremonies. This partly conceals the hatred, but it does not remove it or stop it from growing. I'm afraid that in these circles, even under the cover of contemporary maxims, old instincts and Cainlike plans may only be slumbering, and that they will live until the foundations of the material and spiritual life in Bosnia are profoundly changed. And when will that time come, and who will have the strength to do it? It will come some day, I believe in it, but what I have seen in Bosnia does not show that things are moving in that direction even now. On the contrary.

I thought about it, especially during the last few months, when I was still wrestling with the decision to leave Bosnia for ever. It is

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understandable that a man thinking those thoughts does not sleep well. I would lie next to an open window, in the room I was born in, while the murmur of Miljacka altered with the rustling of the leaves in the early fall wind.

Whoever spends the night awake in bed in Sarajevo can hear the voices of the Sarajevan night. Heavily and surely beats the clock on the Catholic cathedral: two past midnight. More than a minute goes by (exactly seventy-five seconds, I counted) and only then can a somewhat weaker but piercing sound of the clock from the Orthodox church be heard, and it chimes its own two hours past midnight. A little after it, the tower clock on the Bey's mosque strikes the hour in a hoarse, far-away voice, and that strikes eleven, the ghostly Turkish hour, according to the strange calculations of far away, alien parts of the world! The Jews do not have a clock that would sound their hour, so God only knows what time it is for them now, what time it is according to Sephardic reckoning or the Ashkenazy. So even at night, while everyone is asleep, the division keeps vigil in the counting of the late, small hours, and separates these sleeping people who, awake, share joy and sorrow, feast and fast according to four different, mutually feuding calendars, and send all their wishes and prayers to one heaven in four different church languages. And that difference is sometimes in plain sight and open, at other times invisible and deceitful, always similar to hatred, often completely identical with it.

This uniquely Bosnian hatred should be studied and eradicated as some wicked and deeply rooted illness. And I believe that foreign scientists would come to Bosnia to study hatred, as if studying leprosy, if hatred would only be accepted as a separate classified subject of study, as leprosy is.

I thought about studying this hatred myself and, by analyzing it and bringing it to the light of day, to contribute to its demise. Perhaps that was my duty, because, even though a foreigner by birth, it was in Bosnia that I first saw, as it is said, "the light of day." But after my first attempts and lengthy contemplation, I realized that I had neither the ability nor the strength to do it. I would be required, just like everyone else, to pick a side, to be hated and to hate. And I neither wanted that, nor was able to do it. Perhaps, if that was the way it had to be, I could have accepted falling victim to hatred, but to live in hatred and with hatred, to take part in it, that I could not do. And in a country such as Bosnia of today, the one who does not know how to hate or, what is even better and more *difficult, the one who consciously refuses to hate, is always somewhat of a stranger and an outcast, and often a martyr.*

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That is true for you as well, you who were born in Bosnia, and even more so for a newcomer. And so, during one of those fall nights, listening to the odd calls of those diverse and differently voiced Sarajevo towers, I concluded that I could not stay in Bosnia, my second homeland, and that I need not stay there. I am not so naive as to look for any town in the world where there is no hatred. No, all I need is a place where I can live and work. Here I would not be able to do that.

You may now mockingly, perhaps even contemptuously, repeat your remark about my running away from Bosnia. This letter of mine will not have the power to explain and justify my behavior to you, but it seems there are occasions in life when the ancient Latin maxim holds true: Non est salus nisi ni fuga. And I beg of you to believe me this much: I am not running from my human duty, only attempting to fulfill it more completely and without obstacles.

To you and to our Bosnia I wish the best of luck in the new state!

Yours, M. L.

Ten years passed. I rarely remembered my childhood friend, and I would have forgotten him completely, had not the basic idea of his letter reminded me of him from time to time. Sometime around 1930, entirely accidentally, I found out that Dr. Maks Levenfeld had stayed in Paris, that he had an extensive practice in the suburb of Neuilly, and that in our colony of Yugoslavs he was known as "our doctor" who examined workers and students for free and, when needed, even bought medicines for them.

Another seven or eight years passed. One day, again accidentally, I found out the further destiny of this friend of mine. When the civil war broke out in Spain, he left everything and joined the Republican army as a volunteer. He organized dressing stations and hospitals, and became known for his eagerness and expertise. At the beginning of 1938 he was in a small town in Aragon whose name none of us could pronounce properly. In broad daylight, an air raid was carried out on his hospital and he died along with most of the wounded.

That is how the life of the man who ran away from hatred ended.

Translated from the Croatian by Moira Milevoj

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NOAH ISENBERG

On Walter Benjamin's Passages

In 1968, a modest selection of Walter Benjamin's writings appeared in English translation. With its now-famous frontispiece, bedecked with a black-and-white portrait of the brooding European intellectual—about which Susan Sontag would have much to say in her early essay on Benjamin—*Illuminations* was destined to become a classic for generations of Anglo-American readers. Edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt, the volume included such hallmark essays as those on Proust, Kafka, and Baudelaire, alongside Benjamin's musings on the decline of storytelling, his widely anthologized "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," and his so-called theses on the philosophy of history. The collection managed, in due time, to reach an audience not only among members of the New Left, who were given to Benjamin's more political work, but also among countless writers and critics, students of the humanities and social sciences, and non-academic readers eager to learn from one of the twentieth century's most gifted and original thinkers. In the years since, *Illuminations* has continued to remain in print, and can still be spotted on bookshelves and course syllabi around the globe.

At first, Benjamin's Anglophone reception was admittedly small. There were, of course, scholarly journals and magazines, such as *New German Critique* and *New Left Review*, that offered a forum for critical discussion of Benjamin's work (and also a home for the occasional translation of pieces from his vast *oeuvre*). Yet, it wasn't until ten years after the publication of *Illuminations* that a second installment, a companion volume titled *Reflections* (containing such texts as "A Berlin Chronicle," excerpts from *One-Way Street*, as well as Benjamin's city portraits of Marseilles, Moscow, and Naples, and the 1935 exposé of his magnum opus, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"), appeared in English. And although the seven-volume critical edition—with several of the volumes containing two or even three books—of Benjamin's collected writings began to appear in Germany starting in 1972, the lag time for an English translation spanned close to three decades. Now that Harvard University Press has published two volumes

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of its planned three-volume *Selected Writings* and a separate edition of Benjamin's legendary *Passagen-Werk*, or *Arcades Project*, has appeared simultaneously with the entire correspondence between Benjamin and his friend and fellow cultural critic Theodor Adorno, the Anglo-American reception shows much promise for expansion. (In addition, an international Walter Benjamin journal, several Benjamin Web sites, a comic-book-style introduction to his work, two documentary films, a Benjamin monument, and postcards already exist—sure signs that a veritable Benjamin industry is in full swing.)

In many ways, the English publication of the *Arcades Project* marks the culmination of all attempts to bring Benjamin's work to an Anglo-American readership. It is, after all, Benjamin's most expansive, most incomplete, and certainly most controversial work. In her groundbreaking study *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (first issued in 1989, currently in its eighth printing, and perhaps never before so timely), Susan Buck-Morss pronounced the *Passagen-Werk* "a book that was never written," little more than a "massive collection of notes."

And yet, ironically enough, this book now exists—it exists as an imposing, sumptuously designed thousand-page tome, translated and annotated in what may appear to be a generally accessible form. The English edition includes the original thirty-six alphabetized "Convolutes" (the translators have chosen to retain the term *Konvolut*, taken from the German for "bundle," and first used by Adorno, to designate each section) of the manuscript, and also the two "Exposés" that Benjamin wrote, in 1935 and 1939, in the hope of securing funding, as well as a selection of other materials, such as early notes, sketches, and drafts. Two additional pieces round out the volume: Rolf Tiedemann's suggestive essay "Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*," which initially served as an introduction to the German edition (1982), and Lisa Fittko's "Story of Old Benjamin," a brief first-person account (expanded in her *Escape Through the Pyrenees*) of Benjamin's failed flight from Vichy France and his tragic suicide in September 1940.

For well over a decade, from 1927 to 1940, Benjamin labored intensely, with bursts of great productivity and phases of utter stagnation, on his so-called "project." From the outset, he envisioned something grand, an *Urgeschichte*, or "primal history" of the nineteenth century, a work that would revolutionize (on par with a "Copernican revolution," as Benjamin would have it) the way we think about the past and the present and, quite plainly, would revolutionize thinking in and of itself. During its initial stages, from sometime in mid-1927 until

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late 1929, Benjamin bestowed upon his planned work the extravagant subtitle "Eine dialektische Feerie," "A Dialectical Fairy Land" or "Dialectical Fairy Tale," as it is often referred to; in a letter to Gretel Adorno (*née* Karplus) of 1935, Benjamin would call it "A Poetic Fairy Tale." At the time, he saw it to a certain degree as an outgrowth of his *Einbahnstrasse* (*One-Way Street*, 1928), his stunning compilation, or rather montage, of aphoristic writing ranging from urban commentaries to methodological treatises and manifesto-like programs. Indeed, there are certain affinities both in terms of method—the heavy emphasis on the "concrete" as the means through which to examine reality—and of subject matter in the two works. Drawing on the "First Sketches," Tiedemann has assembled a "catalogue of themes" that reveals some of the early focal points of the *Arcades Project*: "streets and warehouses, panoramas, world exhibitions, types of lighting, fashion, advertising and prostitution, collectors, the flâneur and the gambler, boredom." We may further glean from the sketches themselves various ideas that would loom large in Benjamin's intellectual orbit over the next decade, eventually making their way back into later drafts. "The arcade may be conceived as a mineral spa '*Brunnenhalle*'," he writes, "Arcade myth, with legendary source." Or, later, "Arcades: houses, passages, having no outside. Like the dream." And still later: "All collective architecture of the nineteenth century constitutes the house of the dreaming collective." As Buck-Morss eloquently sums up

> The covered shopping arcades of the nineteenth century were Benjamin's central image because they were the precise material replica of the internal consciousness, or rather, the *un*conscious of the dreaming collective. All of the errors of bourgeois consciousness could be found there (commodity fetishism, reification, the world of "inwardness"), as well as (in fashion, prostitution, gambling) all of its utopian dreams.

For Benjamin, who made Paris his "home" for an extended period in the late 1920s and again, more permanently, as a refugee from Nazi Germany, from 1934 onward, the Parisian arcades, those towering iron-and-glass constructions built during the first half of the nineteenth century, were a source of endless conjecture. They were a subject—the "housing" of a series of subjects—that invited a broad sampling from such wildly disparate traditions as surrealism and dialectical materialism, utopian socialism and messianism, positivism and magic. Benjamin perceived the arcades as a "world of secret affinities," or, as he cites, in

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his first "Exposé," from an *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, ". . .[they are] a city, a world in miniature." The project ultimately became Benjamin's chief preoccupation, and even when working on other texts (e.g., on his childhood memoirs, *A Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, his pieces on Baudelaire and Kafka, or his "Work of Art" essay) there was frequently a palpable connection to the arcades. Already in 1930, in a letter to Gershom Scholem, he called the project "the theater of all my struggles and all my ideas." As such, in its fragmentary and incomplete form (as it was purportedly hidden away in the Bibliothèque Nationale during the final years of the war), the work is a type of reservoir of his ideas. It gives few clues of consistency or chronology, and even fewer of the exact course of development. But it does give the ideas en masse, scattered among the passages that perhaps, in the end, constitute Benjamin's *chef d'oeuvre*.

Named in the separate title headings of the thirty-six "Convolutes" are the main figures, motifs, and ideas that circulate within Benjamin's project. Beginning with "Arcades, *Magasins de Nouveautés*, Sales Clerks" and continuing with "Exhibitions, Advertising, Grandville" through "Anthropological Materialism, History of Sects," the work covers a vast amount of ground. Certain figures, such as Fourier, Marx, and Daumier, have "Convolutes" of their own; a central "Convolute" dedicated to Baudelaire—almost an autonomous work—comprises over one-fifth of the entire manuscript. The sections themselves are made up of citations, epigraphs, critical commentaries, aphorisms, and *bons mots*, stacked up on top of each other (originally on note cards and bundled sheets of paper) in sometimes illuminating and other times baffling combinations. Needless to say, it is not your average scholarly study—Benjamin's work defied scholarly models at least since his failed *Habilitationsschrift*, or postdoctoral thesis, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, written in the mid-1920s—and it is not meant for reading in any sort of sequential order. (It should perhaps come as little surprise that, together with its publicity materials, Harvard University Press included "A Suggested Reader's Guide to Tackling *The Arcades Project*.") As art historian T. J. Clark has recently remarked, "This is a book for moving about in, lightly and irresponsibly and, above all, fast."

In an early passage from *A Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, Benjamin formulates a statement that might be applied equally well to his *Arcades Project*: "Not to find one's way about in a city is of little interest. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires practice." Readers of the *Arcades Project* will encounter, at various stages, a kind of losing oneself in the thick labyrinthine passages of the text. In many respects, Benjamin's cherished figure of the *flâneur*, adopted from

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Baudelaire, serves as an ideal guide for touring, or rather meandering about, the *Arcades*. As he writes in "Convolute M," dedicated to the *flâneur*:

> An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts—until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air.

Taking his lead from Baudelaire, whose poetry and prose poems first introduced him to the joys of urban strolling, and later from Louis Aragon (especially from *Le Paysan du Paris*, 1926), Benjamin considered aimless and arbitrary wandering a proper means of viewing the modern world. This mode of perception (Benjamin states repeatedly that the *flâneur's* orientation is "optical"), historical and otherwise, is operative throughout the work. In fact, readers partake of a type of interpretive "*flânerie*" as they move about "unknown districts" of Benjamin's passages. Just as the Parisian arcades are built around the principle of free-flowing excursions, so too, one might say, is the structure of Benjamin's magnum opus.

In her provocative, though occasionally overtheorized study, *The Art of Taking a Walk* (1999), Anke Gleber has aptly termed the *flâneur* "a kind of private eye," a quintessentially urban figure that "investigates the sensations he experiences and the riddles of modernity he registers." Benjamin's fascination with visual experience lies at the heart of his approach. His very descriptions of the project are, in fact, littered with visual motifs.

> These notes devoted to the Paris arcades were begun under an open sky of cloudless blue that arched above the foliage; and yet—owing to the millions of leaves that were visited by the fresh breeze of diligence, the stertorous breath of the researcher, the storm of youthful zeal, and the idle wind of curiosity—they've been covered with the dust of centuries. For the painted sky of summer that looks down from the arcades in the reading room of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has spread out over them its dreamy, unlit ceiling.

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Benjamin once likened his work in the ornate halls of the Parisian library to "being surrounded by an operatic set." Yet, the visual and aesthetic element relates not only to his choice of site, source material, and discursive tenor, but also to the core theoretical underpinnings. Expounding upon a theory of citation, one that is as much visual as historiographic, Benjamin writes, "To write history means giving dates their physiognomy," or, "To write history thus means to cite history. It belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context," and somewhat earlier on in the same "Convolute": "This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage." The idea of literary and photographic montage (we might think of Sasha Stone's famous jacket design for *One-Way Street*) was something that Benjamin had entertained at least since his critique of surrealism from the late 1920s. In the *Arcades Project*, though, such concerns seem to have blended, and in some cases resisted, his concurrent pursuit of Marxist-inspired analysis. (A revealing example, among many, comes from "Convolute O" dedicated to "Prostitution, Gambling": "On the dialectical function of money in prostitution. It buys pleasure and, at the same time, becomes the expression of shame.") The competing currents manifest in Benjamin's work were both a source of praise and opprobrium among readers of its early drafts.

Arguably the most engaged critic of these drafts, and loyal correspondent during the years of the *Passagen-Werk*'s conception, Adorno weighed in on numerous occasions. Initially exposed to the project at an informal gathering in Königstein, outside of Frankfurt, together with Max Horkheimer in 1928, Adorno was overcome with enthusiasm for the project. He shared his enthusiasm with Horkheimer (who would eventually offer praise and, more crucially, financial support), writing in a letter of 1935: "I regard this piece as Benjamin's genuine *chef d'oeuvre*, something which will prove to be of the greatest imaginable theoretical significance, and indeed as such—if such a word is appropriate here—as brilliant in conception." Although over ten years younger than Benjamin, Adorno increasingly took on the role of mentor toward his elder colleague and friend. He offered advice and encouragement, alternately indulging Benjamin's sense of grandiosity and pushing him toward what he hoped would be the project's final completion. "You are well aware that I regard this work as part of our destined contribution to *prima philosophia*," he writes from Oxford in 1934, "and that there is nothing I desire more than to see you finally capable, after all the long and painful hesitations involved, of bringing this work to a

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conclusion which does justice to the momentous subject matter." Two years later, still optimistic, he would pronounce the project Benjamin's "*ultima philosophia*."

Over the years, Adorno provided generous and painstaking commentaries on the *Arcades Project*. He assisted Benjamin in securing financial support and scholarly stipends—the letters document how he enlisted the help of his aunt, various German-Jewish benefactors, and, from 1937 onward, the Institute of Social Research, under the aegis of Horkheimer. (Benjamin's financial predicament remains a recurrent topic in the correspondence, so much so that he frequently shows considerable dependence on Adorno—all the way up to the final years, when Adorno tries to obtain an invitation from Meyer Schapiro and secure a proper affidavit for Benjamin to join his Frankfurt School colleagues in New York.) The initial tone of their exchange is quite formal, even pedantic; it takes nearly a decade of steady correspondence before they switch from the formal "*Sie*" to the informal "*du*," signing their letters with their first names alone, Walter and Teddie. By and large, their discussions revolve around intellectual matters: their respective takes on Kafka; Benjamin's admiration of Brecht and Adorno's skepticism; their critiques (sometimes more gossipy than scholarly) of Ernst Bloch and Siegfried Kracauer; and, of course, Benjamin's progress on the *Arcades*. Despite the generally supportive nature of Adorno's feedback, there are occasional disagreements and intellectual clashes. Writing from New York, in November of 1938, Adorno offers a trenchant critique of Benjamin's work on Baudelaire, submitted in article form ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire") for publication in the Institute of Social Research's journal:

> Unless I am very much mistaken, your dialectic is lacking in one thing: mediation. . . .I am struck by a feeling of artificiality whenever you substitute metaphorical expressions for categorical ones. A case in point is the passage about the transformation of the city into an *intérieur* for the *flâneur*, where one of the most powerful ideas in your study seems to be presented in terms of a mere *as if*. There is a very close connection between these materialist excursions—in which one never quite loses the apprehension one feels for a shivering swimmer who plunges into cold water—and the appeal to concrete modes of behavior like that of the *flâneur*, or the subsequent passage about the relationship between seeing and hearing in the city, which not entirely by accident employs a quotation from Simmel.

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Even when there is strife, however, the tone remains sober, if not detached. Benjamin, in particular, shows exceptional civility in taking the sometimes strong criticisms, thanking Adorno time and again for his advice.

As conditions in Europe of the late 1930s worsen, we can detect within the letters certain personal events, carrying "real" palpable threats, which bring the two poised theoreticians down from their mandarin pedestals. In late 1938, in the wake of the November pogrom, Benjamin laments "the situation of the Jews in Germany from which none of us can dissociate ourselves." Less than two months later, after a brief delay in response that "has nothing to do with theoretical questions," Adorno tells of the difficulty of getting his mother and father, who had been beaten and imprisoned during the pogrom, out of Nazi Germany (he eventually procured entry visas to Cuba). Finally, as is now well known and all too often romanticized, Benjamin's own circumstances eroded beyond repair. In the concluding letter, composed in French on September 25, 1940, the day of his suicide, Benjamin writes, "In a situation with no escape, I have no other choice but to finish it all. It is in a tiny village in the Pyrenees [in Port Bou], where no one knows me, that my life must come to an end."

Six decades after Benjamin's untimely death, the sum achievement of his work has finally gained worldwide attention, in part because it has maintained a great degree of relevance. Reading Benjamin's scattered reflections on the Parisian arcades—the "forerunners of the department stores" and, by extension, the shopping mall—from today's standpoint, it's hard not to think of the bearing they have on the Internet, that ultimate temple of consumerism, a space, or hyperspace, of virtual *flânerie* in the age of information. Indeed, contemporary readers may be inclined to draw on Benjamin's ideas for a variety of uses; his eminent citability, in the service of different enterprises, ranks among the prime factors in his current popularity (there is in fact a seemingly endless appropriation of epigraphs by Benjamin in contemporary writing, not to mention specific venues, such as the Web-based journal *Flâneur*, that use him as a kind of intellectual helmsman). One of the most recent examples of this phenomenon is Larry McMurtry's elegant memoir, *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen* (1999), a work that employs Benjamin as means of opening up larger questions about autobiography, storytelling, memory, and the cultural significance of fiction.

Although McMurtry anchors his reflections in the contemporary world of his native Archer City, Texas—a world that couldn't be farther removed from the one in which Benjamin lived—he shows that despite

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their obvious differences, the spiritual concerns of the American author and the German-Jewish critic yield several compelling connections. He opens the first section of his book, "Place—And the Memories of Place," with the following statement:

> In the summer of 1980, in the Archer City Dairy Queen, while nursing a lime Dr Pepper (a delicacy strictly local, unheard of even in the next Dairy Queen down the road—Olney's, eighteen miles south—but easily obtainable by anyone willing to buy a lime and a Dr Pepper), I opened a book called *Illuminations* and read Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller," nominally a study of or reflection on the stories of Nikolay Leskov, but really (I came to feel, after several rereadings) an examination, and a profound one, of the growing obsolescence of what might be called practical memory and the consequent diminution of the power of oral narrative in our twentieth-century lives.

Pondering possible interpretations of Benjamin's essay, as considered within the very provincial context of west Texan small-town life, McMurtry notes that the arrival of Dairy Queens, which cropped up in the late 1960s (coincidentally, the same time that the first translations of Benjamin became available), provided a place for the exchange of village lore and everyday experiences. In essence, McMurtry suggests, they perform the communal function of allowing local narratives to be transmitted from one person to the next. "Storytellers were nearly extinct," he asserts, agreeing with Benjamin's assessment of half a century earlier, "like whooping cranes, but the D. Q. was at least the right tide pool in which to observe the few that remained."

McMurtry appropriates Benjamin as a springboard into his own concerns rather than as an object of sustained analysis, but the symbolic weight that he attributes to Benjamin's enduring influence is significant. To be sure, McMurtry's memoir adds further testimony to the ever-growing expanse of the Benjamin reception. It seems quite likely that the final publication of Benjamin's collected works in English translation, "a landmark in the American reception," as one critic has called it, will produce yet another generation of Benjamin scholars and readers, maybe even some at the local Dairy Queen.

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TAMA STARR

Letter from Brazil: The Trail of Two Cities

São Paulo violates Aristotle's principle of physics, that two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Two cities inhabit the same smoggy valley—a metropolis of three million wealthy and stylish industrialists, and a mega-slum with a population of fourteen million—intersecting, apparently, only like matter and antimatter.

The guest of an extended Syrian Jewish banking family on the occasion of their youngest son's wedding, I was whisked from one golden neighborhood to another by chauffeured limo. São Paulo's wealthy communities are islands in a dark, mysterious sea. The architectural *leitmotif* is gates: hinged, roll-up, overhead, electric; wrought iron, copper, aluminum, steel; carved, Deco, moderne, medieval—swinging open and shut, creaking up and down.

Outside every mansion and high-rise, half a dozen men with walkie-talkies, relaxed but alert. Guardhouses punctuate the architecture. Empty sidewalks. A shopkeeper from whom I bought Indian artifacts refused to allow me to walk unaccompanied three blocks to my friend's house at midday, delegating a teenaged son to escort me. Drivers routinely ignore red lights, especially at night. Helicopters glide through the air like blueflies, ferrying businessmen and politicians between meetings and home.

Within the wealthy *bairros* (neighborhoods), a world of wit, graciousness, Latin hospitality, and charm. The food is better than in Paris, the manners more refined than Savannah's. A stranger is treated like an adopted child. My host, patriarch Senhor Edmundo, twitted my elementary Portuguese. "Let's speak in Portuguese so that our guest will not be able to understand us," he'd say in Portuguese, enunciating carefully so I would be sure to catch every word.

Portuguese is a beautiful language: liquid, with a huge vocabulary of phonemes and an elegant grammar. My efforts to speak it were applauded (despite Senhor Edmundo's "correcting" my verb endings by changing them from right to wrong). Guessing at vocabulary, I learned that the reprocessed English word is sometimes right, the French or

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Latin word is often right, but the Spanish word, despite near-twinship, is invariably wrong—apparently the only unforgivable solecism.

Besides Portuguese, Spanish, and excellent English, my hosts, like other cultivated South Americans, speak literary French—the language of their education—as well as Arabic, Hebrew, and a language I had barely heard of: Ladino, the Latinate equivalent of Yiddish. I knew about the marvelous food and the music, but did not expect a language *festa*!

The country's immensity and diversity are impossible to comprehend—even, I'm sure, for Brazilians. Twice the size of India, it covers half of South America; Europe could get lost in it. It has jungle, mountains, beaches, deserts, grasslands. . .and inestimable mineral wealth. The Pantanal, a sparsely populated wetlands out west, is bigger than Utah. Amazonia supports a third of the world's known plant and animal species and an unknown number of "undiscovered" tribes. Bahia in the northeast is Afro-Brazilian; the industrial south is European. North Americans are confounded by the multitude of blond, blue-eyed Brazilians.

São Paulo is an international town. Or towns: the Lebanese and Italian communities each number more than a million; there are hundreds of thousands of Germans and Eastern Europeans; the Japanese district, Liberdade, is the largest Japanese community outside of Japan. But I expected a U.S.A.-style melting pot, and this I did not see. Even the servants were fair. With the exception of a gorgeous *mulata* in Bahian costume serving pastries at the wedding, the few black people I saw appeared to be tourists like myself.

Finally I asked, "Where are the blāck people?"

"Black people?" My query was met with puzzlement.

"You know, black people," I insisted. "I've read that over a third of Brazil's population is of African descent."

The answers were vague. "They're in their own neighborhoods." "They're in other parts of the country." The attitude was not hostile, just unaware. I heard nothing that with the most politically correct of intentions I could interpret as racist or in any other way anti-humanist. Poor people and black people are just. . .somewhere else.

Brazil is enjoying an economic miracle. In remission from years of hyper-inflation, military dictatorship, and punishing debt, its industrial base is booming and its technology sector is on par with our own. But nobody pretends the miracle is inclusive. And rising expectations invariably breed discontent. Even the grimmest *favelas* (slums) have cable TV, the Internet, cell phones.

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To a visitor's tentative questions about whether the system might not, let us say, contain seeds of instability, the answer is that the situation is intransigent. "Too many people," I heard again and again, "have an interest in things remaining as they are." The media focus on titillating tales of corruption and scandal, with interchangeable casts of (mainly white) characters. Our media are info-tainment too. But not on this scale.

I am in the outdoor advertising business, so my hosts took me around to survey the city's signs and billboards. A new format, aluminum panels the size of "No Parking" signs, adorns tens of thousands of street lamps on high-traffic boulevards. Dedicated to AOL, UOL (the Brazilian AOL), and other dot-coms, they give the impression that high-tech owns the streets.

The best advertising locations in the city, though, belong to graffiti writers. Giant, incomprehensible messages—using an ornately elegant "alphabet" different from that of our taggers, with African-looking, Hebrew-ish, and totally fanciful hieroglyphics—blaze down from parapets our professional installers could not reach with two-hundred-foot cranes. At ground level, similar messages march across fencing and sidewalk bridges. Remarkably, they are almost never defaced. I was especially struck by the work of one anonymous artist who consistently lays down a gleaming silver-gray background behind his eerie red and black communications. Nobody touches that artist's work. The messages scream out, immensely compelling and impossible to understand.

My hosts were bewildered by my fascination with this anti-establishment form of expression. I acknowledged that it is a defacement of property and a defiance of order. "But don't you see?" I said. "It's how they talk to you." Big words from the silent city, the one they don't see or hear.

"What are they saying?" asked my hosts.

"I don't know," I said. "But perhaps one ought to listen."

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GORMAN BEAUCHAMP

Orwell, the Lysenko Affair, and the Politics of Social Construction

A YEAR OR SO AGO *The New York Times* included in its Metropolitan Diary the following anecdote, a dialogue between a father, driving, and his three-year-old son sitting beside him:

> Son: Look, Daddy, I just saw a black Mazda.
> Dad: That wasn't black. It was dark blue.
> Son, *indignant*: If you was me, sitting in my seat, you would have seen a black Mazda.
> Dad, *with a sigh*: Okay, it was a black Mazda.
> Son, *emphatically, after a pause*: No, it was red.

If current academic trends hold and the child sticks to his guns, he will no doubt find a tenured spot waiting for him in one of our elite universities and a place on the editorial board of *Social Text*, for he has grasped precisely—from his infant seat, so to speak—the ethos and modus of postmodernism. As the academy's increasingly shopworn "discourse," postmodernism effaces, as Christopher Norris puts it, "all sense of difference between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion, serious and non-serious discourse." Or as one of its proponents Zygmunt Bauman strenuously observes, the postmodern "braces itself for a life without truths, standards, ideals." And, he might have added, largely without facts. A British writer, for instance, outlined in *The Guardian* what the postmodern university is to look like: "'Facts' are a much despised, lower order munitions, as out of date as the rifles of the Crimean War. The arsenals of facts should be kept discreetly in the background and the University should not 'impose' these facts upon students if they don't want to be told about them." Similarly, the new history to be taught in our high schools, if the California-based National Center for History (NCH) has its way, will not be much burdened by facticity. Defending its agenda for curricular reform, *National Standards—United States History*, one NCH member proposed on the *McNeil/Lehrer Newshour*: "Let's let the kids out of the prison of facts,

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the prison of dates, and names and places, and let's let them discuss really important momentous points in American history." Others have found students today already liberated, to a remarkable degree, from the prison of facts. Senator Bob Kerry, in the debate over a proposed flag burning amendment, argued that a greater danger to America than flag burning is "when 50 percent of our youth do not know what side Hitler was on in the Second World War." A professor at the University of Michigan reports, in an op-ed piece for *The New York Times*, the result of a survey of junior and senior journalism students: "Fewer than half could say when World War II began and ended." These examples reflect wider-ranging and more systematic examinations of the contemporary state of student knowledge, which does not appear overly fact-burdened: still, the spectacle of classes full of students who don't know when World War II occurred or whose side Hitler was on discussing this "really momentous turning point in American history" seems so quintessentially postmodern. For was it not Michel Foucault, the icon of the iconoclasts, who assured us: "There are no facts"?

• • •

AN EVEN EARLIER pioneer in postmodernism's attitude toward fact—toward objectivity, rationality, universality, all of which are denigrated, if not denied—is Orwell's Comrade O'Brien in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The crucial demonstration of the-truth-that-there-is-no-truth (other than the Party's will) occurs in the long, painful agon-*cum*-torture-sessions conducted in the headquarters of the Thought Police, the Ministry of Love, between O'Brien, Orwell's Grand Inquisitorial figure, and Winston Smith, the novel's fitfully rebellious protagonist. To destroy any sustaining faith that Winston retains in an objective, suprasocial reality, beyond the reach of even Oceania's pervasive totalitarianism to repeal, O'Brien must force his victim to actually see five fingers when he holds up only four—or to be unsure of what he actually sees, which comes to the same thing.

> "How can I help it?" [Winston] blubbered. "How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four."
>
> "Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder."

Truth in Oceania is whatever the Party needs it to be, a variable criterion. "You must get rid of those nineteenth-century ideas about the

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laws of Nature," O'Brien declares. "We make the laws of Nature." And can alter them at will, apparently, for "we control the mind" and the only reality "is inside the skull." In its denial of any sort of objective reality—even the axioms of mathematics, even the laws of physics—Oceania practices, in O'Brien's apt phrase, "collective solipsism." Orwell intended in his dystopia to counter this collective solipsism, of course, this equation of truth with the dogmas of one or another of what he called the smelly little orthodoxies of this age.

Although transmogrified, the smelly little orthodoxies that Orwell despised are still very much with us, and their academic O'Briens are busily at work in their respective Ministries of Love demonstrating to bemused undergraduate Winstons that what they had taken to be truths are merely cultural constructions not to be counted on. History, literary studies, anthropology—such disciplines long ago succumbed to post-modernist Pyrrhonism, but "soft" as they are, empirically challenged, they do not pose the essential *defi* to postmodernism's claims that the sciences do. To deny the possibility of objective knowledge, the sciences would have to be culturally relativized. To this end, the hyper-trendy postmodernist journal *Social Text* entitled its Spring 1996 issue "Science Wars," indicating the editors' desire to extend the Culture Wars, in which they had achieved more or less unconditional surrender from the humanities and social sciences, to a more ambitious theater. One essay in this issue included this representative sentence: "It has thus become increasingly apparent that physical 'reality,' no less than social 'reality,' is at bottom a social and linguistic construct; that scientific 'knowledge,' far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it." Merely O'Brien with worse jargon. Somewhat to the chagrin of the editors, the essay—"Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity"—was a hoax, a hilarious farrago of (mostly) francophile gibberish, perpetrated by a professor of physics at CUNY, Alan Sokal, who elsewhere confessed to being "a stodgy old scientist who believes that there exists an external world, that there exist objective truths about that world, and that my job is to discover some of them." Still the quoted sentence as well as the entire essay that it encapsulates easily passed for the real thing, distilling the nonsense contained in numerous citations of Derrida, Lacan, Luce Irigaray, and the like—the pomo pantheon of heavy hitters—as well as those of one of the journal's editors, Stanley Aronowitz, cited seventeen times. Most telling, perhaps, was Sokal's revelation that, even after he had outed the essay in *Lingua Franca*, another of the *Social Text* editors refused to believe

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that it was a hoax, a variation on the confession of an Irish bishop that he believed hardly a word of *Gulliver's Travels*.

The Sokal hoax may have represented a temporary setback in the postmodernist's campaign, like the Spartans in the pass at Thermopylae, but the assault on scientific objectivity continues apace in a spate of books and papers with titles like *Ethnomathematics* and "Queer Statistics." Although, as Edward Rothstein notes, "no champion of ethnomathematics has provided examples of mathematical facts that are culturally relative," still this lapse has not prevented postmodernists from rehearsing their relativizing mantras. In such circles, as the philosopher John Searle points out, "O'Brien is supposed to have triumphed over Winston after all."

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THE PROTOTYPE OF MOST twentieth-century dystopian fiction—in content, not form—is Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*; but students of dystopia must be struck by the 180-degree turn that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* takes from that seminal work, in which the Underground Man argues precisely that, as a proof of human autonomy, two times two should mean whatever we want it to mean at any given moment. For Dostoevsky in the mid-nineteenth century the direst threat to human dignity came from the crude scienticism that predicated all behavior as rigidly deterministic, governed by inviolable laws. The radical *raznochintzy* or Nihilists (as Turgenev malaptly christened them) of Russia in the 1860s worshipped at the altar of science: for through science—and its sociological variant, positivism—the hated old order would be destroyed, they believed, and the new, utopian order realized.

The millenarian schemes of such believers—captured in purest form in the enormously influential, if enormously dull *tendenzroman* of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*—provoked Dostoevsky to the writing of *Notes*, a riposte point by point of the mechanistic determinism of Chernyshevsky, whose alter-ego in the novel declares, for instance: "Your personality. . .is a fact. Your actions are necessary conclusions from the fact. . . .You are not responsible for them. . . .You acted as necessity dictated. . .and could not have made a different choice." Confronted with such a conception of *fact* as this, with the Nihilists' belief that human beings have no more autonomy than a piano key that has been struck, the Underground Man opts for caprice, for the indeterminate and unpredictable, even for the willfully irrational.

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> Two times two makes four is, after all, something insufferable. Two times two makes four seems to me simply a piece of insolence. . . . Once you have two times two makes four, there is nothing left to do or understand. . . .I admit that two times two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are going to praise everything, two times two makes five is sometimes also a very charming little thing.

This mocking rejection, however capricious and exaggerated, of the simplest mathematical formula serves as Dostoevsky's metaphor for the claims of the imaginative and the spiritual in an increasingly positivistic world that would deny them any reality. Like his artistic mentor Dickens, for instance, with McChokumchild's school in *Hard Times*, Dostoevsky viewed the stress on *facts*—on objective knowledge and the scientific method that validated it—as dangerously reductive and deformative of the complexity of our existence.

In the century that separated *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from *Notes from Underground*, an enormous historical irony, however, had transpired. The ideological heirs of the *raznochintzy*, the Bolsheviks, had come to power in Russia: the millennium of "scientific socialism," soi-disant, supposedly had arrived. But instead of the veneration for scientific truth, for objective knowledge, for facts that should have accompanied the advent of the Revolution, Russia by the 1930s was systematically persecuting scientists and replacing results discovered in their labs with obiter dicta formulated by the Politburo. In the Soviet Union—as in its contemporaneous totalitarian alter-ego, Nazi Germany—ideological orthodoxy became the criterion of truth, even of scientific truth. Nazi ideology, Orwell noted in a 1942 essay, "Looking Backward on the Spanish Civil War,"

> specifically denies that such a thing as "the truth" exists. There is, for instance, no such thing as "science." There is only "German science," "Jewish science" etc. . . .If [the Leader] says that two and two are five—well, two and two are five. This prospect frightens me much more than bombs—and after our experiences of the last few years that is not a frivolous statement.

When the threat of Nazism had waned but the power of Communism was waxing, Orwell made this observation about the ideological determination of truth the cornerstone of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, his nightmare image of a completely totalitarian future. "The persecution of scientists in Russia," he contended, was one of "the intellectual

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implications of totalitarianism. . .which should have been foreseeable 10–20 years ago." The instance that most brutally exemplifies his premise is the decade-long war against genetics that came to be known as the Lysenko affair.

T. D. Lysenko, an agronomist who came to prominence by drawing unwarranted conclusions from haphazard experiments, spearheaded and became the symbol of the "dialectical" approach to science—that is, the effort to mesh science with Marxist dogma (particularly as Comrade Stalin defined that dogma). Twentieth-century genetics had abandoned the Lamarckian theory that acquired characteristics are heritable, in favor of the Mendelian theory of random mutation: so that, while geneticists did not deny that environment had an effect on heredity—did not deny that, in the long run, mutations arise from external as well as internal conditions—still they held that such mutations have an indirect, chaotic nature. There exists, that is, no direct connection between heredity and environment, certainly no possibility of *directing* changes in heredity through manipulation of the environment. No fact was more firmly established among geneticists than the indeterminate, undirected nature of mutation. Such a view, however, was anathema to Marxists and, indeed, to millenarians generally, who wanted to believe, in Ortega y Gasset's formulation, that what man has is not a nature but a history. Lysenko and his allies rejected gene theory, then, *a priori*—as bourgeois and metaphysical, the reactionary denial of the forces of progress. I. I. Prezent, Lysenko's chief collaborator, declared in 1937 at a meeting of Soviet scientists: "It is possible to alter the heredity nature of the plant." For geneticists this is the equivalent of arguing that two times two equals five.

Still, the Lysenkoists (or Michurinists, as partisans of this persuasion were usually called) prevailed in the Soviet Union, not by experimentation—their experiments were dismissed by the Nobel laureate geneticist H. J. Muller as "mummery"—but by diktat. Tentatively at first, but ever more aggressively, the pseudo-science of dialectics drove out the real science of genetics, in which Russia, in previous decades, had excelled. The authority of Lysenko as a science czar depended on the favor of Stalin, who was, in fact, credited—among his many towering intellectual achievements—with having "inspired the Michurinists in their fight against neo-Darwinism as an idealistic perversion of biology." Appeals to the Great Leader were frequently made to decide scientific questions, as the testimony of this investigator reveals:

> Encouraging me with friendly paternal words, Stalin gave me advice. And in his wise counsel there was such crystal clarity, such

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> power of scientific prevision, that my heart stood still with pride. Pride that there is on this large planet a man intimate and dear, for whom all complex questions and problems are an open book, for whom, in all detail, the path of development of Soviet progressive science is clear.

Clearly, when such a leader speaks, two times two will equal whatever he wants it to—at least for those within the reach of his secret police. Indeed, under Stalin scientists with the temerity to oppose the Party line were dismissed from their positions, often imprisoned, sometimes executed. Not only genetics, but other sciences, even physics, were attacked: Einstein's relativity theory, Bohr's complementary principle, Linus Pauling's theory of resonance, and other landmark discoveries of modern science were, Zhores Medvedev points out in his exemplary history, *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko*, denounced as reactionary and "idealistic"—that is, not compatible with dialectical materialism. But genetics, because it relates more directly to human behavior, fell under the greatest interdiction: during Lysenko's supremacy there was a virtual ban on the study of human genetics. Human heredity had become a taboo subject. (The first post-Stalinist book on human genetics was published, in fact, only in 1964!)

The Lysenko phenomenon suggested to Orwell the totalitarian denial of objective truth that O'Brien expresses so melodramatically: his sadistic catechism of Winston Smith distilled decades of Soviet subversion of the concept of objective scientific knowledge. But as that era passed and Marxist totalitarianism itself, in most of the world, receded into history, its practice of collective solipsism assumed its postmodern form. A spectre is haunting culture studies, the spectre of Comrade O'Brien.

• • •

AT THE HEIGHT of Lysenko's reign, the Minister of Education, Kaftanov, ridiculed the very idea that there were heredity diseases: what kind of progressive socialist society would it be that conceded so immutable a role to genes? This position was part of the campaign to represent the study of human genetics as a reactionary, fascistic scheme designed to preserve the inequities of capitalism. Geneticists were depicted as allied with Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and other virulent racists, working against the efforts of progressive elements to abolish inequality and empower the working class. Articles on genetics in the popular Soviet press were illustrated with pictures of Storm Troopers, hooded Klansmen, lynched

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blacks, and the like. "In reality," writes Medvedev, "fascism was afraid of real scientific genetics: in Hitler's Germany a number of genetic institutes were closed, and outstanding German geneticists were forced to leave their native land."

The Lysenkoist practice of conducting scientific argument by calumny, however, persists very much in our own day, particularly when genes are in question. While the study of the genetic causes of certain diseases meets with little (although some) resistance, even to ask whether our genes predispose us toward certain forms of behavior or influence our intellectual abilities is immediately condemned as "scientifically incorrect." A case in point is a conference planned several years ago at the University of Maryland on the genetics of criminal behavior. So much protest was generated by the *mere announcement* of the conference that the National Institutes of Health withdrew the funding before the meeting could take place. After a three-year battle by the organizers, the funding was restored and the conference occurred—accompanied, of course, by the inevitable protesters wanting to shout down the proceedings. Some participants in the conference expressed doubt that biology has, as one put it, "anything to add to public discussions about crime in society"—a perfectly legitimate position, of course, the premise that the conference was meant to examine. But the objections had more to do with the uses to which biological evidence might be put than with evaluating the truth of the evidence. For instance, Dr. Dorothy Nelkin said in *The New York Times*: "Genetic explanations are extremely convenient when you are trying to dismantle the welfare state. You can identify social problems with biology and the individual, which deflects responsibility from society." Perhaps in other venues Dr. Nelkin addresses the science of the topic; here she simply substitutes the politics of it. One suspects that even if further research could yield definitive answers to crucial questions about the relations of genes and crime—or other types of deviant behavior—many people, including many scientists, would rather not know the answers than have the answers contravene their political faith.

Thus the whole field of sociobiology appears, *ipso facto*, illegitimate to "progressive" forces. One of its leading theorists, Edward O. Wilson, states the central premise of sociobiology this way:

> Human beings inherit a propensity to acquire behavior and social structures, a propensity that is shared by enough people to be called human nature. Although people have free will and the choice to turn in many directions, the channels of their psychological

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> development are nevertheless—however much we might wish it otherwise—cut more deeply by the genes in certain directions than in others. . . .Deep history—by which I mean biological history—makes us what we are, no less than culture.

Moderate as this statement sounds, it is anathema to those for whom culture—because malleable and meliorable—must be all-in-all. The Sociobiology Study Group, founded to combat Wilson et al., and including several Harvard professors, linked such research to Nazi ideology. At the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1976, a resolution to censure sociobiology—"book burning," Margaret Mead protested—was defeated, but quite narrowly, Wilson notes in his memoirs, *Naturalist*. Two years later at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, members of something calling itself the International Committee Against Racism picketed Wilson's appearance—some of their placards bore swastikas—and then rushed the speaker's platform and poured a pitcher of water over his head, shouting "Wilson, you're all wet!" Lysenko meets the Three Stooges.

About a decade later, in 1986, a group of forty or so academics meeting under UNESCO auspices in Seville drafted an anti-sociobiological manifesto that came to be called the "Seville Statement on Violence." Drafters of the statement began pushing to have it declared "official policy" by scientific associations: the American Anthropological Association and the American Psychological Association both adopted it; the American Association for the Advancement of Science refused. The document, as several of its critics have noted, is a perfect example of Lysenkoism, political pronouncement replacing scientific inquiry. The five propositions of the statement each begin with the formula: IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT. . .followed by dogmatic and absolutist assertions, thus attempting to establish by fiat the "truth" not only of all past and current research into the causes and nature of violence but all future research as well. Not only did the document reject the possibility that humans have any innate biological tendency toward aggression, it further accused those who suggested such a connection of having provided justification for violence and war.

Some dissenting members of the Anthropological Association rejected the idea that scientific issues could be settled by votes of the memberships of professional organizations. One anthropologist, Walter Zenner, expressed his distress that colleagues "act as if scholarly decisions can be made by legislation and resolutions rather than through research [and] open debate." Even more emphatic was Robin Fox, who,

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having demonstrated the weak and fatuous nature of most of the assertions in the "Seville Declaration," continued:

> The point is not whether one or the other of the positions here supposed to exist is *true* or not; the point is that IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT to say that position X or Y is true or false—especially on the grounds offered in the Declaration. Either position should be stated in a way that leaves it open to refutation: then it is "scientific" and open to argument. Thus, I have quarreled here with the arguments of the Declaration, not to prove an alternate view "true". . .but simply to show that there are valid objections and alternatives that the document arrogantly dismisses as "impossible." This is profoundly antiscientific. . . .No position can be declared "correct" or "incorrect" by fiat.

Fox notes ironically that Seville was the home of the Inquisition and suggests that the promulgators of the Declaration were similarly trying to enforce an orthodoxy by silencing heretics—those whose "alleged biological findings. . .have been used. . .to justify violence and war." "I know of no one in any discipline," Fox responds, "who has ever used biological findings to *justify* violence and war. This is an outrageous libel." Both Zenner and Fox adduce the Lysenko affair, science by calumny, truth by fiat.

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ALL HIS ADULT LIFE Orwell was a man of the left, a socialist; still he was and remains one of the most effective critics of its authoritarian and irrationalist tendencies. Of what he called "the English russophile intelligentsia," Orwell claimed that "It was only *after* the Soviet Union became unmistakably totalitarian that English intellectuals, in large numbers, began to show interest in it." He once commented to a friend, "I notice people always say '*under* Socialism.' They look forward to being on top—with all the others underneath, being told what is good for them." At least since Robespierre, the dangerously authoritarian implications of the dictatorship of virtue have been all too evident, so that Orwell, while making effective demonstration of the dangers from the evidence of his age, breaks no new theoretical ground here. But his linking leftoid authoritarianism to epistemological and axiological relativism, as he does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, accurately predicted the

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advent of today's postmodernism, which posits connections between the denial of objective truth and political radicalism.

Edward Said, himself something of a postmodernist panjandrum, nevertheless has noted a crucial fact about the growing democratization and egalitarianism in the world that subverts that supposed connection: "that the great antiauthoritarian uprisings made their earliest advances, not by denying the humanitarian and universalist claims of the general dominant culture, but by attacking the adherents of that culture for failing to uphold their own declared standards, for failing to extend them to all, as opposed to a small fraction of humanity." Put another way, would an oppressed people stand to gain more from Jefferson's Enlightenment premise "All men are created equal" or from the assertion from a postmodernist manifesto, that ideology "deludes us in promoting as universal values that in fact belong to one nation, one social class, one sect"? Would African-Americans in the 1950s have profited from accepting the contention of critical legal studies—postmodernism applied to jurisprudence—that, as the sophist Thrasymachus argued, justice is merely the will of the stronger party? What appeal do the weak make if there is no valid principle of justice, only power? Alan Ryan, the British political philosopher, puts the matter well:

> It is pretty suicidal for embattled minorities to embrace Michel Foucault, let alone Jacques Derrida. The minority view was always that power could be undermined by truth. . . .Once you read Foucault as saying that truth is simply an effect of power, you've had it. . . .But American departments of literature, history and sociology contain large numbers of self-described leftists who have confused radical doubts about objectivity with political radicalism, and are in a mess.

The politics of the social-constructionist left call to mind the quip of a contemporary of the Duke of Buckingham that "he never did undo any of his enemies, but he ruined many of his friends."

Katha Pollitt, in a piece in *The Nation* occasioned by the Sokal hoax, questions how "the pomo left," which has marginal real-world significance, has achieved such hegemony in academia.

> I suspect it has something to do with the decline of actual left-wing movements outside academia, with the development in the 1980s of an academic celebrity system that meshes in funny, glitzy ways the worlds of art and entertainment with careerism. . . .What

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> results is a pseudo-politics, in which everything is claimed in the name of revolution and democracy and equality and anti-authoritarianism, and nothing is risked, nothing. . .is even expected to happen outside the classroom.

Apposite as Pollitt's assessment is, it fails to account for why *this* particular ideology, fact-phobic and ultra-esoteric, should become the radical academics' substitute for activism, why *it* emerged as the *chic du jour* for the careerist. The collective solipsism of Oceania in Orwell's novel represented the Party's attempt to control reality, to conform it to its purposes; but, in the most controversial and probably least persuasive theorem in the book, Orwell (or at least O'Brien) posits the exercise of power to be an end in itself, not the means to some higher purpose. "One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes a revolution in order to establish a dictatorship. . . .The object of power is power." Oceania, O'Brien explains, is the exact opposite of the utopias imagined by the old reformers, who used totalitarian means for idealistic ends. In making this claim, Orwell quite explicitly eschews the perverse paternalism famously advocated by Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, that the utopian philosopher kings are cruel to their charges only to be kind. Other dystopian writers like Yevgeny Zamyatin in *We* or Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* or Kurt Vonnegut in *Player Piano* develop this theme—ironically, of course—to demonstrate the evil consequences resulting from good intentions. The road to dystopia is paved with utopian projects.

The collective solipsism of the social constructionists stems, no doubt, from precisely this utopianesque desire to remedy the world's evils (or what they construe to be the world's evils). If the facts won't fit the nostrums, deny the facts—or that there are facts. If reality appears hard and recalcitrant, deconstruct it and construct a new one—in the classroom anyway, in collaborating journals. This postmodernist stratagem doesn't change the world, but it makes its proponents feel better: rather like the word magic that ameliorates an unpleasant condition by euphemism. The defining example of this practice, called in China "the rectification of names," is the Ming emperor who, when petitioned to help his subjects flooded by a dangerous river, changed its name from The Wild One (Wuting) to The Peaceful One (Yungting). Here we have, in effect, the ideology-in-practice of the social constructionists.

On the one hand, postmodernism may be little more than a tempest in the academic teapot, relatively harmless. A few years out of college and experience and common sense will probably erase for most students

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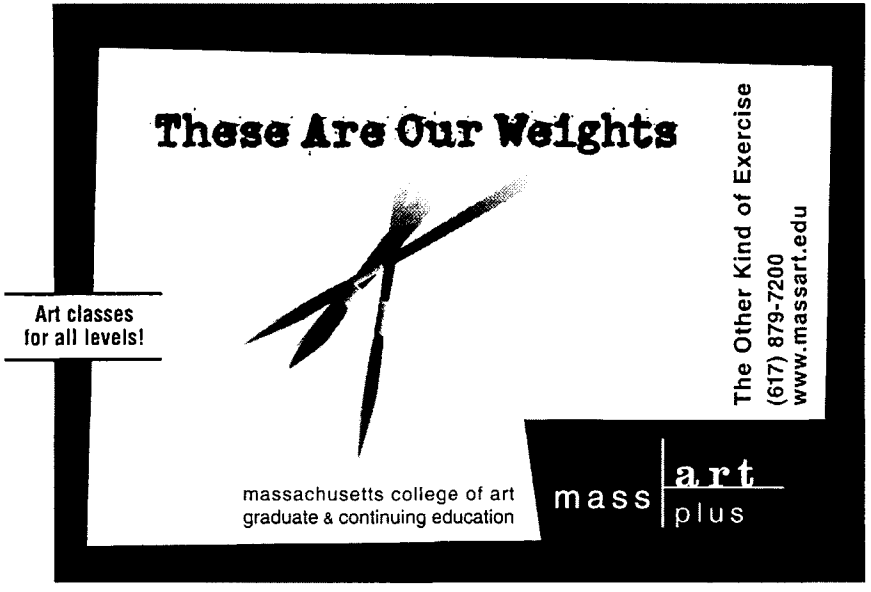
whatever trace effects remain of their "radicalizing" humanities and social science courses. On the other hand, some critics of postmodernism see its baleful influence spreading throughout the culture, "a dangerous license," writes one, "for disruptive propaganda or sociopathic behavior." Legal theory that denies the possibility of justice, political practice predicated on equivocation and subterfuge, even scholarship that fails to distinguish between fact and fabrication: these—and worse—have been deemed the spawn of postmodernism. Whatever the case, any worldview that can conform reality to ideology, that can "disappear" facts at will, that can subvert the very concept of objective truth clearly would serve the needs of authoritarians. This was the truth hypothecated by Orwell, historically demonstrated by the Lysenko affair. Out of this same experience with totalitarianism and its ideological (mis)construction of truth, Camus in *The Plague* has a character affirm the essential imperative: "But again and again there comes a time in history when the man who dares to say that two and two make four is punished with death. The schoolteacher is well aware of this. And the question is not one of knowing what punishment or reward attends the making of this calculation. The question is that of knowing whether two and two do make four."



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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

For those of us still deeply engaged by "traditional" modernist issues, the past season offered real pleasures—and an interesting subtext. The pleasures? Some older masters of recent abstraction, several of them artists whom Clement Greenberg admired, revealed what they had been doing during the past few years, while some of their slightly younger colleagues demonstrated that serious, unironic abstract painting is alive and well. The subtext? The enthusiastic reception of the "Greenbergian" artists' shows, in contrast to the hostility their work often generated in the last years of the controversial critic's life; Jules Olitski's exhibition of sumptuous new paintings at Ameringer/Howard, for example, was named one of the ten best of 2000. Is the zeitgeist once again in sympathy with these artists' work or has their work changed, now that Greenberg no longer frequents their studios, so that it is once again in tune with the zeitgeist? Or has the famously exacting critic's ghost finally been laid, so that the art he liked can be evaluated on its own merits, instead of being filtered through a haze of private animosity?

Whatever the answers to these questions, there was no doubt that many of the paintings in Olitski's recent show *were* terrific: moody, idiosyncratic, and sensuous. Like his colleague Kenneth Noland, whose recent lush permutations of the Circle format were also seen last season at the same gallery, Olitski takes full advantage of the expressive possibilities of new paint technology. Noland uses the luminosity of a new acrylic formula to make haunting images in which glowing, almost over-the-top color harmonies are tempered by cool, symmetrical structure (more about that later), while Olitski exploits the dramatic tonal and chromatic shifts encouraged by some of the sexier paint additives to give form to a full-blown Romanticism. As to whether Olitski's new work differs from what he was doing before Greenberg's death, the answer is yes and no. The gorgeousness of the paintings at Ameringer/Howard, like their disquieting sense of flirting with kitsch and pulling back into the sublime, have precedents in both Olitski's earlier abstractions and in the superheated landscapes in pastels that have engaged him over the past few years. The landscapes, which test the limits of such risky

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imagery as sunsets and flamboyantly backlit cloudscapes, inform the operatic chiaroscuro and the pools and sweeps of unnameable color in Olitski's recent abstractions, creating overtones at once cosmic and vaguely landscape-like. These primordial associations are reinforced by volcanic splits and cracks that occur as the densely piled paint dries, yet at the same time, this spontaneous "drawing" offers a welcome antidote to the incipient excess of the richly inflected, swirling expanses of color, returning us to the fact of abstractness; so do large, loose shapes that seem to have momentarily pulled themselves into being in some pictures, to provide landing places in the surrounding flux.

Olitski's admiration for late Titian and late Rembrandt is palpable in these nacreous, brooding pictures, as is a kind of nostalgia for the specific, wrenching narratives and introspective figures these masters painted, and perhaps for the once-shared, no longer current associations and beliefs that generated such pictures. Olitski seems to have set himself the task of reclaiming the emotional intensity of the dramas that engaged his predecessors, without relinquishing any of the hard-won freedom of abstraction. In the strongest of his recent paintings, he comes close to his goal.

Noland's Apollonian new pictures are at the opposite end of the spectrum from those of his Dionysian colleague's. If Olitski is a Romantic, Noland is a Classicist and his newest paintings, like the Circle paintings that first established his reputation in the late 1950s, are dedicated to revealing effortlessly the sensuous beauty of the rational. Noland began to revisit the Circle format in 1998, in a series of exquisitely nuanced, delicately inflected small paintings that embodied his rethinking of this iconic composition in light of forty years' accumulated experience of making and thinking about art. The large-scale Circle paintings in his last exhibition were the most recent evidence of this reconsideration and reinvention of the motif.

At first acquaintance, Noland's new Circles seem cooler—in all senses of the word—and more distanced than his earliest versions of the motif in which hesitations, excitement, and traces of the hand sometimes revealed themselves (before they mutated into tense solar systems of slender bands). Yet the new Circles often prove to be more complex than their antecedents. From a distance, they seem elegant, suavely balanced, and confrontational; their centralized composition seems comprehensible and logical. Yet as we approach, crucial smaller incidents assert themselves—the soft contact of one color with another, fragile lines, minute differences between edges and surfaces—incidents that

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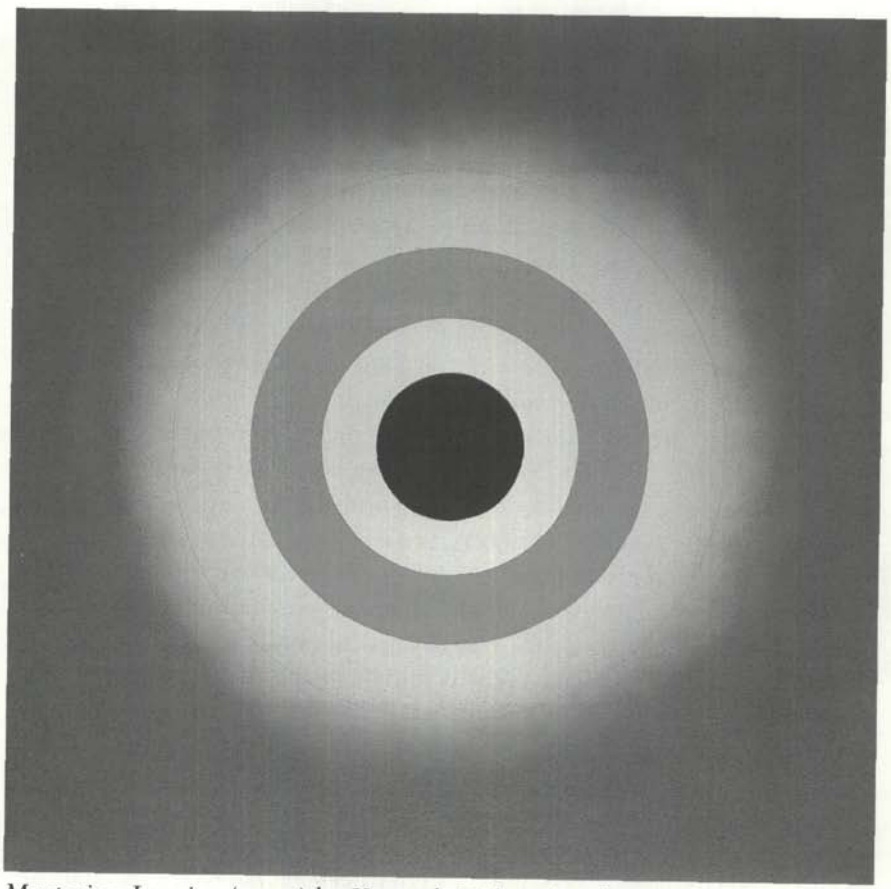

Mysteries: Lumina (2000) by Kenneth Nolan. Acrylic on canvas. 48 by 48 inches. Courtesy of Ameringer/Howard.

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force reconsideration not only of our sense of our spatial relationship to the picture, but also of our initial understanding of its structure.

What's perhaps most striking about the new Circles is their opulence. Noland uses a recently invented type of paint distinguished by exceptional luminosity and saturation of color, and a built-in subtle refraction of complimentary hues. The chemistry, explained to me by its manufacturer, is plainly magic, but chemistry is the least of it. What makes the best of Noland's recent pictures magical—as it always has—is this great colorist's ability to play on our emotions and tweak our associative powers by setting intuitively adjusted zones of disparate or closely related hues side by side. That the pigment he now uses is intensely light-responsive and radiant simply makes his paintings seem more disembodied and fragile, despite their visual richness and often substantial size.

The circle format allows Noland to concentrate on intervals, amounts of color, sequences, and visual weights. By acknowledging the center of the canvas, he implies a point of origin, a reference against which everything else is measured, but the size and proportion of that reference point varies from picture to picture and the logic of the system is constantly disrupted by chromatic relationships that alter the tension between the variously proportioned bands and the supporting rectangle. What might be, in the hands of a less intuitive, more cautious painter, merely a respectful homage to Euclid, becomes, instead, an ordered, lucid, but ultimately mysterious celebration of the delights of the seen. In many of Noland's new pictures a single intense hue dominates, like a powerful orchestral chord against which the voices of individual rings of color make themselves heard. Or to change musical analogies, the jazz-loving, jazz-knowledgeable Noland takes a familiar tune of his own composition—the circle structure—and plays it like the virtuoso he is, giving it new harmonies and rhythms, remaining open to the unexpected, and making the result fresh, exciting, and deeply moving each time.

Larry Poons showed new works at Salander-O'Reilly: exuberant, expansive, unpredictable paintings that combined collaged-on elements, slapdash but assured drawing, and gatherings of nervous, staccato brushstrokes, all of it put into the service of a palette of chalky, fresco-like colors, and—as has been true of Poons's pictures of the past few years—all of it vaguely suggestive of the perceivable world. There was something speedy, off-hand, and—well—peculiar about these pictures, at least at first acquaintance, but they insisted that we stay with them and rewarded time spent. When we gave ourselves up to exciting waves of syncopated color, then half-glimpsed images floated into our consciousness, as though flashed on a screen or seen from a moving car,

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Visitaurus (2000) by Larry Poons. Acrylic on canvas. 78 by 105 3/4 inches.
Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

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only to declare themselves once again as painting events. Surfaces seemed at once unequivocal and mutable, as thickets of strokes came together to form dense tapestries of broken color or reverberated from thick, applied "pieces" of drawing. Spaces opened into landscape forms, contracted into interiors, and then sank again into the loaded surface of the canvas. Despite the size and rowdiness of these recent works, they were strangely intimate: Bonnard on drugs.

The spontaneity, riskiness, and accomplishment of these recent paintings are qualities Poons's poured paintings taught us to expect of him. What is new, in his recent pictures, is his deployment of distinct, albeit untrammeled, shapes and clearly bounded zones of color. What's new, too, is his evident pleasure in handling paint, his exultation in a rapid, fluent touch. Poons speaks often of the necessity of "getting out of your own way" in painting, by which he means letting instinct and, I suppose, plain old talent dictate what happens on the canvas instead of imposing taste or will. As he did in his best poured paintings, which pitted the liquidity of paint against the force of gravity and ended up as emblems of the inevitable and the eloquent, Poons manages, in his best new works, to remain playful and open to the gifts of chance—whether in terms of experience, observation, or the behavior of materials—at the same time that he provides ample evidence of his formidable visual intelligence. The very newest paintings at Salander-O'Reilly were the most exhilarating. They shifted in and out of reference, pulsing between expanses of broken color and crisp drawing, punctuated by hits of collage, like an irregular drumbeat. I kept thinking about Stuart Davis's quintessentially urban abstractions, which Poons's paintings resemble in mood, although not in appearance. At once lyrical and abrasive, these brash, street-smart improvisations embody the energetic pace of the way we live now.

A very different notion of the world is proposed by Andrew Forge's quiet reconstructions of perceptions, seen first in a show of canvases and works on paper at the New York Studio School and later in a smaller exhibition of recent paintings at Robert Miller Gallery. Just why Forge's drifts of dully glowing or creamy dots, interrupted, at times, by free-floating rods of color, should be so potent remains mysterious to me, but somehow, these slowly silted-up expanses of pigment conjure up particular qualities of light, temperature, time of day, season, and place without making any reference to appearances. A recent series of dark, slightly ominous pictures, with warm ochre "curtains" on either side and little flickers of ochre distributed at wide intervals across the darkness, *felt* like they were about brilliant light filtered through dense trees, yet they also tested conceptions of symmetry and notions of

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depth. Did the golden "curtains" frame the darkness or push it forward? Or were they embedded in it?

Forge's deliberate deposits of color are self-sufficient parts of a pictorial fabric—he speaks of his dots as "real"—not pointillist marks subservient to illusion. Even though each picture is rooted in the painter's experience of place and time (and it shows) they are equally about the fact of a repetitive touch and the material character of the paint that touch deposits on a surface. Those dots—or in some paper works, rhythmic strokes—become, like Cézanne's touches, building blocks of reconstituted sensation, not a means of depiction. It was particularly illuminating to see Forge's apparently dispassionate, but strangely charged meditations on nature in the company of Robert Miller's concurrent exhibition of Joan Nelson's updated versions of Romantic landscape painting. The difference, I suppose, is that between mediated and unmediated experience. Forge aims at being truthful to his perceptions, as directly as possible, in the material of paint; Nelson assumes a faux-nineteenth-century vision of a subverted Sublime to illustrate ideas about an idea about nature. At Robert Miller, Nelson's ruminations on the history of landscape painting seemed pretty airless and inert, despite their often spectacular subject matter, but maybe that was the point—the failure of art in the face of nature, or something of the kind. By contrast, Forge's painstaking expanses of scintillating dots seemed all the more atmospheric and alive.

That mid-career artists still believe in the expressive power of abstract painting was borne out by shows by Michael Mulhern at Salander-O'Reilly and Pat Lipsky at Elizabeth Harris. On one level, Mulhern's large, gestural, near-monochrome abstractions continued the dissection of painterly painting that has preoccupied him for the past decade or so, but, as in the past, his seemingly detached, thoughtful research produced disquieting, poetic images that are anything but detached. Mulhern appears to break painting into such irreducible components as touch, expanse, and layering; he appears absorbed by fundamental questions of the painting's existence as object and as illusion, yet he also seems to ponder more elusive notions of the meaning of concealment—both literally and metaphorically.

In Mulhern's recent pictures, generous sweeps of metallic aluminum paint simultaneously obliterate or thinly veil loose constellations of drifting marks. The shifting inflections of density and matteness of the surface, the degree of visibility of the tracks of his painting tools, even the tonal and coloristic variations in his rich palette of greys, off-browns, and near-blacks depend upon how and when Mulhern manipulates his

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Sluggo 23 (2000) by Michael Mulhern. Aluminum based oil paint. 105 by 113 1/4 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

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materials. Everything he does (or chooses not to do) remains visible and as a result, his best pictures appear to happen while we watch, sometimes suggesting that they might unravel or melt if we looked away, sometimes promising—but failing—to reveal the substratum of private notations that may or may not condition the upper layers.

In Mulhern's latest paintings, gatherings of overscaled strokes appear to exist almost independently of their support, fraying away from the edges, seeming to hang weightlessly, like airborne curtains. In some, it seems as if the very surface plane of the canvas had been called into question, as though it were reconstituting itself as a dark, disintegrating mass. Further ambiguity is produced by denser clusters of paint that seem to hover in yet another spatial zone, enhancing the sense of instability and incalculable space in the most arresting of these pictures. Mulhern explores a wide pictorial and emotional range with deliberately limited means. Each painting at Salander-O'Reilly, while clearly part of an ongoing series, was extraordinarily unlike the others. Individually, they were among Mulhern's best work to date; collectively, they made you eager to see what would happen next.

Pat Lipsky's recent works, like Mulhern's, were expansions of continuing preoccupations, here the tension between order and disorder, between idealized concept and imperfect reality. It's possible to describe these paintings as irregular grids painted in a rather slapdash way so that gesture and the accidental fight it out with ideal geometry. Yet this account omits much of what made these pictures original: the true complexity of both their color and their compositions. The grids, for example, were usually present only by implication, constructed not with intersecting lines, but with irregular stacked rectangles arranged in rows, while color was rarely what it seemed to be at first viewing. Some of Lipsky's recent pictures dissected a single radiant hue into surprising variants that could seem like completely different colors if you looked long enough; others explored chromatic contrasts with similar effect. (One of the best, however—certainly the least ingratiating—probed a range of browns and olives, with the toughness of the palette echoed by syncopated squeezings of the grid itself.)

Just as prolonged looking made colors seem to shift, it caused the graphic organizing principle of Lipsky's paintings to fray. The hand, and by extension, the act of putting paint on a surface began to take precedence over the fact of that surface and its divisions. Splatters, wavers, and all manner of humanizing irregularities removed us from the realm of the Platonic archetype and located us firmly in a rather messy actuality both entirely about painting and open to infinite associations. Like the struggle

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between richly orchestrated color and deceptively neutral structure at the core of these pictures, the struggle between such conflicting conceptual possibilities deepened the impact of Lipsky's recent works.

These exhibitions of first-class, mature abstract painting were reassuring alternatives to shows like that of the fashionable young painter Lisa Yuskavage at Marianne Boesky. Just why Yuskavage's over-scaled images of pneumatic babes bathed in lurid colors—think upscale versions of the raunchy comic "Little Annie Fannie"—routinely elicit enthusiastic hyperbole remains puzzling, even allowing for the pervasiveness of postmodern irony. It's possible that these slick, cartoon-like exaggerations masquerading as Art (capital A) are the visual equivalents of the glorified school lunchroom food disguised as Cuisine (capital C) currently in vogue at certain chic hangouts—another instance of fashion as a refuge for the perceptually challenged—but I'm still baffled.

Happily, a reassuring alternative to such mysteries was offered by "Time and Tide," recent paintings by the British-born, now Boston-based John Walker, at Knoedler, a powerful, uncompromising exhibition that proved that resonant, even disturbing, specific imagery and passionate, accomplished paint-handling can coexist in exciting ways. Walker showed works from two very different series—chilly extrapolations from the Maine coastal landscape and anguished meditations on the horrors of the First World War—linked mainly by common force of feeling, urgency of touch, and breadth of ambition. It's somehow typical of Walker, who clearly sees painting as a lifetime's undertaking that, of necessity, reflects the complex variables of living, to present us with apparently unrelated bodies of work (both, however, logically connected to his previous endeavors) and bring it off.

Of the two groups, the Maine landscapes were the more consistent. Walker's seashore is a bleak, threatening zone of mudflats and lowering cliffs. Spaces shift. Patches of fiercely worked, dull, autumnal color suggest particulars of place without losing their identity as paint. Cliffs loom and then flatten. A haunting recurring shape of a tidal pool wrenches itself out of context, becoming, like the suggestive "vessels" of an earlier series, at once figure-like and evocative of some kind of universal organic form. Marsden Hartley, in his more despairing moments, would recognize Walker's Maine, yet the more time we spent with these tough, pure pictures, the more seductive their murky depths became.

The war paintings expand on the iconography of a wonderful series of prints Walker did a few years ago, a fusion of written texts, mostly by British poets who fought in the First World War, with an image of a uniformed figure with a sheep's skull as a head, an eerie creature who,

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Remembrance II (2000) by John Walker. Ink and oil on canvas. 79 by 84 inches. Courtesy of Knoedler & Company.

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Walker says, is meant to stand for the agony of every soldier's experience and particularly that of his father, who was wounded in the carnage of the Somme. In some of the war paintings, despite the undeniable fascination they exerted, the scale and rhythm of the written words, whether decipherable or not, seemed at odds with the scale and rhythm of the picture as a whole. Yet sometimes the results were unforgettable, as in one of the largest war paintings, in which the overscaled writing seemed to dissolve into an expanse of paint, so that fragmented meaning became only an enriching reverberation, while the sheep-skull figure shifted in and out of life as potent symbol and ravishing passage of painting. All in all, a splendid show, not to be missed by anyone who cares about painting.

No one who cares about sculpture should have missed Anthony Caro's show of recent work at Marlborough. The heart of the exhibition were the sculptures Caro made when he was one of twenty-four artists invited to make works in response to paintings of their choice from the collection of the National Gallery, London. Caro's seven pieces, shown as a group for the first time in Marlborough's rather unsympathetic 57th Street space, were triggered by an intimate little Annunciation by Duccio. The Duccio Variations ring changes, in materials ranging from steel to wood to plaster, on an allusive architectural enclosure, an abstracted cubic shrine pierced by arches, loosely derived from the painting's setting, with the protagonists of the religious drama implied, but never present. The tension between the Virgin and the Angel, the mystery of the moment, is suggested by absence—by the literal space between enclosing elements. In some of the series, a sliced sphere, at once vaguely liturgical and an echo of Brancusi's cup, turns a horizontal interior plane into an altar.

The series is uneven; some of the variations seem generated less by sculptural imperatives than by curiosity about what might be provoked by the confrontation of a fairly circumscribed theme and a particular (often, for Caro, unfamiliar) material. But the best, such as the first variation, in steel and wood, are absorbing, self-contained structures that strangely exclude the viewer by creating a private, highly charged, infinitely desirable, perhaps even sacred precinct that we catch glimpses of, but can never enter. (This quality of pushing away is not new to Caro's work, but that's subject matter for another essay.) In some variations, the presence of the geometric "vessel" intensified this sense of innerness; the dense, albeit small point of focus made the sculpture more physical by reminding us of what it feels like to grasp a massive form scaled to the hand and, at the same time, sharpened our awareness of

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Pierced Block (1997) by Anthony Caro. Steel and wood.
45 ½ by 32 by 30 inches. Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery.

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the impossibility of actually handling that form, the impossibility of penetrating Caro's sacrosanct fictive places.

Two other recent series, Concerto Pieces and Gold Blocks, bracketed the Duccio Variations. The former, a group of playful, rough cast brass table sculptures, transformed fragments of musical instruments into engaging constructions that gained in sculptural energy the more their origins were obscured by dissection and recombination. In the best, it was only after prolonged study that we began to think about the real nature of those swelling bells and suave curves. The most compelling sculpture in the show was *Pierced Block* (1997), from the Gold Blocks, two brutal, distorted near-cubes of steel, stacked to form a quirky, implacable mass with an odd "waist" and a demanding, confrontational presence. The upper block, with its deep, squared-off "excavation," was offset and irrationally garnished with chunks of wood, steel, and a slab of the stoneware from which the series takes its name. The result? An enigmatic, unignorable object that raised insistent questions about the nature of interior and exterior, of mass and penetration—questions that have increasingly preoccupied Caro in recent years, along with many other, often wildly divergent questions about what sculpture can be. *Pierced Block* is slightly cranky, deeply serious, and impossible to forget.

As a sort of counterbalance to this wealth of ambitious recent work, a modest, but exciting show at June Kelly Gallery provided an intelligent footnote to the history of American modernism. Kelly showed a group of never-before-seen works on paper by the inventive African-American painter William H. Johnson, some of them dating from the extended period when he lived in Europe. Johnson's brilliant, stylized visions of black American life, painted after his return to the U.S., are increasingly known these days, both because of their own abundant merits and because of the Johnson's evident influence on the late Jacob Lawrence. The examples of this work at June Kelly's were first rate, with their economical compositions and bold Fauvist palette, but what was most illuminating were the pictures that made unequivocal Johnson's deep understanding of European modernism, especially Expressionism. Seeing these accomplished, energetic pictures made it clear how informed the work Johnson made in the U.S. was by his understanding of adventurous European art. At the same time, it underlined how deliberately he went about inventing a sophisticated, simplified, personal visual language to describe his perceptions of a Harlem that he was both part of and distanced from. Alas, this cache of unknown work, which comes from Johnson's heirs, is finite, but we're lucky to have even this addition to enlarge our understanding of this important painter.

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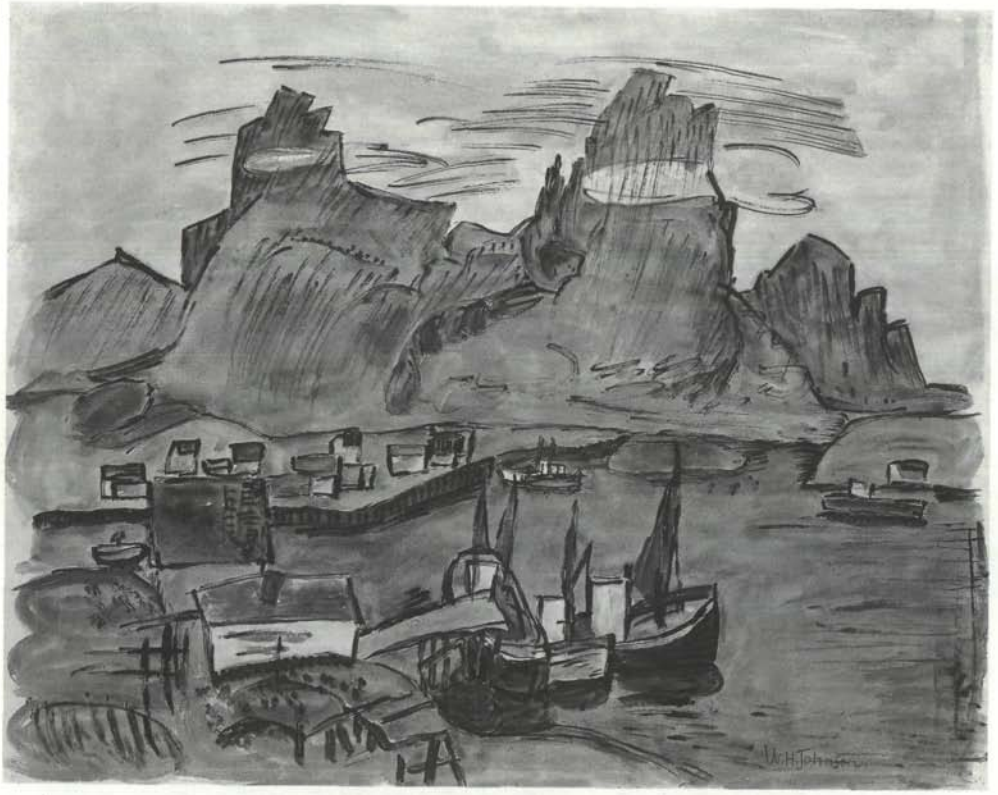

Lofoten (1937) by William H. Johnson. Watercolor and ink on paper. 18 by 23 inches. Courtesy of June Kelly Gallery.

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WILLIAM LOGAN

The Wax-Modelers

To make wax models of the dead,
  their livers, lungs, and broken hearts,
  is not the lowliest of arts.
The feelings must be cast in lead.

Where does the mortal soul exist?
  In dry apartments of a fate
  where noisy unpaid Shylocks wait
the resurrection of the dead.

In heaven will our bodies take
  the form they loved themselves to be
  in some austere philosophy
that kept our living selves awake?

Or will the naked dead surround
  us at the cold gates of the gods,
  who claim that though we beat the odds
we lost our beauty underground?

Pity the dead in their distress:
  Rochefoucauld knew, or should have known,
  each meets his long decay alone.
True love, like prayer, is pitiless.

The brighter clothing of our flesh
  will drop away, and leave its mark
  in all that genuflective dark
where we must learn to sin afresh.

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STEPHEN SANDY

Denial

Adam said Penelope was just in denial
that was all, we all understand;
her inability to think it was him
after all those years, the test of the bed,
consider all that business about
an olive tree, maids carrying the mattress
outside her door for the poor fellow.

Denial afflicts us all because
who wants to believe what has
happened happened and
nothing can be done even though
so many years have gone by and we
are completely different
and they are completely different

having fought all those battles and
lost all his men again and again
before losing his gear including
loin-strap and fleece jacket;
acclimated self to so many seductions
holding on through so many storms
sea salt in scrapes, in limbs bruised blue.

Conclusion

Musée des Beaux Arts

Icarus: his two white legs
sticking out of the
sea, making a victory sign.

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CLÉMENT MAROT

Of the Abbé and His Varlet

The abbé and his man are of one kind—
One pod, two peas—each in his wine immersed:
One big, one little, but both much inclined
To madcap revels in the name of thirst;
One drinks the best, the other spurns the worst.
But come the evening they will disagree:
Monsieur *l'abbé* cannot, the night long, be
Without the succor of his alcohol;
And monsieur varlet cannot sleep if he
Has not drunk down the flagon, dregs and all.

Epigrammes, I, LXVI

Translated from the French by Norman Shapiro

R. T. SMITH

Bantry Boat

Turf craft, they call it, a slab pressed flat
and stamped by Wild Goose Studio in Cork
with the Bantry Boat, St. Brendan and four
monks afloat on a sea of crosses, their currach

a new moon, a rib, a ripe slice of melon.
I hiked someone's pasture in a sun shower
to view the gray pillar my guide book touted
as the legendary Kilnaurane stone.

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The evening bay shone chalice silver.
North wind waved a sea across the meadow,
along Rope Walk Road and the swinging gate.
Four oarsmen and their stern navigator

were almost rubbed smooth by tourists, weather,
the itchy sheep. I could just make them out,
their scythe of a boat vertical, its prow
facing heaven and the rain. What I have now

is this palm-sized replica where stout
sailors are straining, their faces eager.
Someone's brain-child, this new use for peat
from the duty-free makes a cheap souvenir,

green as a tortoise box washed in shadows.
It's always cool as moss in that sun shower
I wish to remember, the fleecy meadow,
my need to see the remnant plinth, mythic

enterprise, pilgrimage of sheer spirit.
The relic of brothers rowing a dreamboat
now harbors on the brim of my kitchen sink,
where it should be kept, before the window,

trim and ready, exposed to moonlight,
forever handy, and close to moving water.

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REBECCA SEIFERLE

Toledo

The synagogue of Samuel Ha-Levy
is full of the laughter of God. He laughs
ha ha in the nave of larch wood, relieved
to be so free of images, no longer forced
into limbs. He laughs in the psalms of David,
written into the walls, still dancing naked
before the niche, empty of Ark. He laughs
and Samuel laughs with him. Samuel who died,
being tortured, his dignity, the hidden
treasure of which he would not speak. . . .The Holy
of Holies of Samuel Ha-Levy forced
to become the Transit of the Virgin,
the Jewish Quarter made into a cloister,
then a barracks, a warehouse, and *ha*, *ha*,
a time came, when the Virgin vanished too.

And most of the saints in Spain
are the lost children of the Jews.

REGINALD SHEPHERD

Interglacial

White of extinct gods' etch and simmer
spills from salt heaven, pluvial
law of breakage suffering
away from himself, throat kissed
shale black. (Shall I compare thee,
incommensurate, and greet you as
a god, good substitute? Lie

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still and let me listen to your skin.)
Hieratic wrack having attained
the age of representation, refutation:
see him so water, so clearly dissolved.

He wonders if he might be the visible,
spontaneous prosody of gesture,
recurrent, irretrievable, and only in part
a god, part of a god: belief fragment
worn smooth by glaciers in retreat,
abraded by the Pleistocene to glimmer,
shine, scuttle and glyph luster. Odor
of artifice, odor of lies
down in the teeming interior sea,
salt flats of Lake Bonneville
where water was slept away.

MICHAEL LIND

On the Cherwell

Old cultures, like old couples, learn
abbreviation, letting gesture serve
        as proxy of
reclusive words. Just think of with
what idioms of shrug this punter hints
        to friend, to love,

to us and other diners by
the bank tonight of sentiments too fine
        for mouth to mold,
conveying what he feels with grip
and glance instead. The boat begins to pitch
        because he poled

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flamboyantly; his passengers
rebuke him by inclining in the stern,
straw brims the weights
adjusted on an orrery
that balances and reconciles these three
old worlds. None prates,

none analyzes; all is shift
and countershift between the trees, black wicks,
and waxen gold,
as gravities align around
the axis of this latest staff to plough
the sifted mold.

JUDITH HALL

The Cheer Regained

A fair amount was left to us on the hill,
So long as we accepted sacrifice:
The small goat eyes of the virgin,
The boy, no longer one of us. He was led along
Multitudes and master flutes lifted
To the sky. The shouts
We added added us to sacrifice, now
His belly slits, now thrown on the swept-together
Shaved evergreens. And we shouted in the whirling ash
For healing, as if healing were "heaven enough."

We held each other up, dancing with the fire
Up the next gold hill. The little kick I learned
In lemon crocuses.
We danced more human, or so we assumed, because
The old habits overvalued what comes in
To fill the absences,
The sleeping sunlight where the family passes on.

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The losses, the nectar there: Blood, taken up,
Is passed to us with such serenity. "Serenity!"
But it was because we broke him between us like bread.

Because "more human" was a healing-being-woundedness,
Not human enough, not a gladness fleshed.
The faun gazing on wine
Leaps away from us. We were running now for the last hill,
The rumpled gold mess we called a bed.
And will I raise the wet walls
Whitewashed over us, and the long red beams? Will he
Keep the door open as the flowers open
Which is not long? This will be the wonder of experience:
What we found was more than we were left on the hill.

JAY ROGOFF

Captivity in Spring

The robin's cyclical ruckus,
its helical whistle
like a spiraling molecule,
tenses in spring to knock us
out of our jeans. Gets hard to focus

on the world at hand—rather,
in my hand: old photograph
that captures half your life
for me, fixed by the shutter—
click—you're now fifteen, before

the correct blocks of your school,
before a quarter century
unspools, replicated like the rusty
gate of the blue jay's bray
now topping the robin's wrangle.

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The coils, the toils, the zippers
of our years spirit us into shadow.
Well. Let us consult in camera.
Music, birdies. Be we prisoners?
Enter in bravely; clap to the shutters.

YVES BONNEFOY

"Passer-by, these are words. . ."

Passer-by, these are words. But instead of reading
I want you to listen: to this frail
Voice like that of letters eaten by grass.

Lend an ear, hear first of all the happy bee
Foraging in our almost rubbed-out names.
It flits between two sprays of leaves,
Carrying the sound of branches that are real
To those that filigree the still unseen.

Then know an even fainter sound, and let it be
The endless murmuring of all our shades.
Their whisper rises from beneath the stones
To fuse into a single heat with that blind
Light you are as yet, who can still gaze.

May your listening be good! Silence
Is a threshold where a twig breaks in your hand,
Imperceptibly, as you attempt to disengage
A name upon a stone:

And so our absent names untangle your alarms.
And for you who move away, pensively,
Here becomes there without ceasing to be.

Translated from the French by Hoyt Rogers

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HANS KONING

The Mourning of Captain Johnston

> *Johnston. To the memory of David, Capt., 5th Yorks Regt., who fell in action at Contalmaison, Battle of the Somme, July 12, 1916.*
>
> —Notice in the personals column of *The London Times* of July 12, 1995

Splintered trees dripping on the mud,
and children crying, Tommee, gum, Tommee,
and the smell of long dead horses
in the last village he marched through,
the lopsided grins on the soldiers' faces,
those pale skins of undernourished childhood:
that was the last day of David Johnston.
But through these six-point letters, four one-column lines,
once every July for seventy-eight years now,
his name faced the light of an English morning,
evoked a darkened image,
a whisper-thin memory of an unbelievable day.
This too will come to a stop,
and it had no meaning, sorrow only.

DIANA DER-HOVANESSIAN

Cookie Sayings

"How you look depends on where you go
not: where you go depends on how you look."
A Chinese fortune cookie told me so.

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How you do depends on who you know.
How you eat on what you cook.
And how you look decides where to go.

Where you reach depends on how you grow.
What you catch depends on bait and hook.
The Chinese fortune cook will tell you so.

Slowly I learned (learning for some is slow)
what you read depends upon which book.
And how you look upon the school you go.

When you fall into a stream go with the flow
or get out. It's wet in brooks.
Even Chinese cooks will tell you so.

But the wise don't put their faith in cook-
ies. Not everyone cultivates just looks.
But fortune cookies insist it's so:
Where you look depends on where you go.

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BOOKS

Darkness at Noon

THE BLACK BOOK OF COMMUNISM: CRIMES, TERROR, REPRESSION. By Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, Jean-Louis Margolin. Harvard University Press. $37.50.

WHY WAS THIS BOOK WRITTEN and published in France and not the United States? Surely there are greater academic resources available here than in France including documentary materials, research facilities, funding, scholars capable of conducting such research, and a potentially far greater number of readers.

But, as Martin Malia observes in his excellent introduction, social processes which resulted in such a vast number of victims "never aroused a scholarly curiosity proportionate to the magnitude of the disaster." Or, as Stéphane Courtois asks, "Why such a deafening silence from the academic world regarding the Communist catastrophe which touched the lives of about one-third of humanity?"

It is difficult to discuss the crimes of communism without morally rejecting communism. This is where the problem begins. Anti-communism in the United States had been discredited (among intellectuals and other elites) first by Senator McCarthy and later by the Vietnam war which the great majority of academic intellectuals have perceived as a particularly destructive and irrational outcome of anti-communism. In the wake of Vietnam, the enduring conventional wisdom is that the Cold War, the arms race, and the (alleged) failure of American society to pay proper attention to its social problems and injustices can be blamed on anti-communism.

The idea of superpower equivalence, or moral equivalence—popular between the late 1960s and the collapse of the Soviet Union—provided further disincentives to looking closely at the crimes of communism. Fear of nuclear war too had its share in silencing criticism of the Soviet Union: the peace movement (anxious to combat attitudes conducive to conflict) preferred to dwell on the similarities rather than the differences between the superpowers.

The rise of the Third World revolutionary societies—China, Cuba, Vietnam, and later Nicaragua—promised to restore the good name of

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communism (or socialism), was compromised by the Soviet Union even in the eyes of many on the left.

The 1960s created a sharply increased awareness of the crimes of the United States, associated with capitalism, the white race, white males, and the Western world as a whole. Many on the left who were increasingly preoccupied with the evils the United States represented and its alleged responsibility for a wide variety of global problems deemed it morally unqualified to criticize communism. The communist systems and their spokesmen offered critiques of the United States (and the Western world as a whole) which were congenial to native critics. President Reagan's reference to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" inspired widespread and enduring derision, as would the idea of "the crimes of communism" in some circles.

In Soviet studies the so-called revisionists held the United States responsible for the Cold War, dismissed the concept of totalitarianism and its applicability to communist systems, and sought tenaciously to redefine the "crimes of communism" (without using such terminology) as far as the victims of Stalin's regime were concerned. Those of other communist states, except Cambodia, were almost totally ignored. These scholars were also anxious to dismiss any connection between Marxism-Leninism and communist practices. They preferred to attribute their repression to chaos, bungling, accident, local feuds, unintended consequences—anything that was not a major, defining attribute of these political systems and their leaders.

Discussions of the crimes of communism have also been scarce because the topic almost inevitably leads to totalitarianism. Few of those who reflected on these crimes could fail to see that they, or the worst of them, were connected to the totalitarian characteristics of these states. Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Cuba under Castro (for much of his rule), North Korea under (and after) Kim Il Sung were totalitarian. But so was Nazi Germany and for that reason the term came to be avoided as it drew attention to the similarities between political systems wholly discredited (Nazism, fascism) and those—the communist ones—many sought to save from total disrepute on account of their putative, early idealism and association with the ideas of Marxism. These systems were viewed by some with greater indulgence because they were seen as counterweight to the power of the United States, NATO, or the West. Moreover, in the United States but apparently not in France, the far better known and documented evils of Nazism also diverted attention from the evils of communism. As did the

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prestige of the Soviet Union, ally of the United States and Britain during World War II, and the sufferings of its people in those years.

Until very recently there was virtually no photographic documentation of the crimes of communism. Such visual images may be necessary to arouse moral indignation that translates into sustained inquiry into the causes of the horrors portrayed.

At last it may be that the kind of conformity detected in America by Tocqueville survives and helps to account for these attitudes even among supposedly iconoclastic academic intellectuals. Once certain conventions and beliefs become established and upheld by a vocal minority, few apparently have the stomach to challenge them and risk becoming unpopular in the circles they move. As the public expression of anti-communist sentiments became both morally reprehensible and a matter of poor taste, American intellectuals were not going to probe the crimes of communism. Even after the collapse of Soviet communism it remains difficult for many in the academic-intellectual community to come to terms with the fact that Soviet communism was not merely inefficient but morally wrong, and that its original ideals and goals (derived from Marxism) were unrealizable and conducive to its "excesses" and misjudgments.

Why social and cultural conditions in France were different, making it possible to produce such a volume, is not easy to answer. Apparently, disenchantment with communism and Marxism among French intellectuals was more powerful and widespread than in the United States, especially after the publication of the *Gulag Archipelago*. There, for a long time, Marxists and communists were a legitimate and dominant cultural and political force, embodied among other things in the huge French Communist party—their beliefs and loyalties inspired a stronger reaction. By contrast, in the United States communists and their supporters were a far more marginal and sometimes persecuted minority (especially in the postwar period), until the Vietnam war and the questioning of anti-communism it inspired restored them to a quasi-heroic status within much of the intellectual community.

It would be hard to discuss this volume without addressing two questions: what was communism, and what were its crimes? Although these are no great mysteries here, there remains much obfuscation when "crimes" and "communism" are linked. Some authors would doubtless argue that we cannot talk about such crimes because there was no unitary political system called "communism," that the whole concept is fuzzy, perhaps a form of conceptual "red baiting."

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But there were communist systems and they do not defy definition any more than other concepts referring to complex social-political realities like capitalism, socialism, feudalism, democracy, etc. To start with, it was more than a meaningless gesture that these systems and movements called themselves "communist" whether in Vietnam or Bulgaria, Albania or Cuba. Secondly, every one of them legitimated itself with the ideas associated with Marx, Engels, and Lenin and attempted to realize or apply some of them. For instance, they shared an ideologically generated and institutionalized intolerance of private property and believed that its abolition would usher in abundance and social solidarity; they abhorred and repressed religion; they held peasants in contempt and forced them into collective farms. Thirdly, all of them were governed by a ruling and putatively infallible party often in combination with an infallible and deified leader. Fourthly, they all relied heavily on propaganda to complement coercion. Fifthly, they all interfered with the free movement of their peoples, especially across borders with non-communist states. Sixthly, they all developed powerful and highly differentiated political police forces. Still, these shared characteristics do not mean that they were identical systems throughout their existence.

As to the crimes of communism, some would argue that they were the responsibility of individual leaders, their personal pathologies, and abuse of power (as Khrushchev argued, blaming Stalin for all the evils of the system). Others said the crimes resulted from bureaucratic "excesses," the flaws of human nature and other "non-systemic" matters.

The crimes described in this volume first and foremost document mass murder on a massive, spectacular scale; imprisonment and the institutionalization of forced labor on a similarly grand scale; the deprivation of people of a wide range of political, personal, or group freedoms and rights; and the adoption of policies resulting in widespread material deprivations (including famines) in the service of rapid industrialization and militarization. Official lying on a grand scale and the encouragement of citizens to spy on one another contaminated public discourse and undermined trust and any sense of civil responsibility.

Even a volume close to 900 pages cannot do justice to the long overdue stocktaking of these crimes. This is a huge task and the amount of available documentary information is uneven. The book devotes the most space to the Soviet Union (268 pages) whose crimes are the best known, while the lesser known crimes get short shrift. Ninety-three pages are given to the whole of South Eastern Europe (Poland gets 31); 83 pages to China (that leads in the absolute number of victims); 58 to Cambodia (that leads in the number of victims as a ratio of the total

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population); 35 pages to communism in Latin America (mostly Cuba but including Nicaragua and the Shining Path guerrillas of Peru).

Surely China and Cambodia would have deserved far more space, Cuba a chapter of its own, Afghanistan more than 20 pages, Laos and Vietnam more than 11 pages combined, Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique more than 21 combined. There are three other chapters (not well integrated into the volume though valuable in themselves) on "The Comintern in Action," "The NKVD in Spain," and "Communism and Terror" as well as concluding and introductory sections to *some* of the five parts of the book: "The Soviet Union," "World Revolution, Civil War Terror," "Eastern Europe," "Asia," and "The Third World." The reader is not informed how the somewhat haphazard organization of the book was arrived at, or how the contributors were chosen. Nine of them are French (or reside in France), one is Czech, and one Polish.

The authors' major goals were to right the historic imbalance between information about the crimes of Nazism and those of communism (or, to present "a balance sheet of. . .Communism's human costs") and to provide a "memorial" to the victims of communism.

Both goals have been accomplished to some degree, however incompletely and unevenly. It is in itself an accomplishment that a substantial volume reexamining the crimes of communist states and their commonalities was put together. And it is commendable that the authors did not feel compelled to abstain from passing moral judgment.

The *Black Book* reaffirms the magnitude of the crimes: approximately 100 million people killed and hundreds of millions brutalized in other ways. The toll breaks down as follows: USSR, 20 million (a rather conservative estimate); China, 65 million; Cambodia, 2 million; North Korea, 2 million; Afghanistan, 1.5 million; Eastern Europe, 1 million; Latin America, 150,000.

Furthermore, and especially in regard to the Soviet case, the book makes clear that, in the words of Malia, "there never was a benign, initial phase of Communism before some mythical 'wrong turn' threw it off the track," and that the Soviet "Red terror cannot be explained as the prolongation of prerevolutionary political cultures"—a proposition that will not endear the book to a substantial portion of our left-liberal intelligentsia.

Most important is the reaffirmation of the common link between communist political violence and official ideology—especially the doctrine of class struggle curiously missing from many recent Western discussions of the connection between theory and practice. The original and major source of communist political violence was the Marxist belief

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in class struggle as the "violent midwife of history" even if it had other stimulants as well, such as intra-party struggles for power, personal pathologies, bureaucratic overzealousness, and the commitment to create a huge and permanent slave labor force. As the chapter on Cambodia points out, the "intention was to create an egalitarian society in which justice, fraternity and altruism would be the key values, yet like other Communist regimes it produced a tidal wave of selfishness, inequality and irrationality."

Rather than attempting to summarize the diverse chapters, a small sampling of some lesser known facts and aspects of the crimes of various communist states will be illuminating.

Not all the crimes of communist states began with Stalin. For instance,

> the Kholmogory camp, on the great river Dvina, was sadly famous for the swift manner in which it dispatched a great number of its prisoners. They were often loaded into barges, stones were tied around their necks, their arms and legs were tied, and they were thrown overboard into the river. Mikhail Kerov one of the main leaders of the Cheka, had started these massive drownings in June 1920. . .a large number of mutineers from Kronstadt, together with Cossacks and peasants from Tambov province. . .were drowned in this fashion in 1922.

In that area, Order No. 171 stipulated that "any citizens who refuse to give their names" should be shot on sight and "wherever arms are found execute immediately the eldest son in the family."

Another monumental crime was the Soviet famine of the early 1930s the occurrence of which may be familiar to a handful of educated Americans but few are likely to know that it was not due to natural causes but to human-political design. "In all regions affected by the famine, the sale of railway tickets was immediately suspended, and special barricades were set up by the GPU to prevent peasants from leaving their district" to make sure they would not escape the famine. In 1933, while millions were dying of hunger, the Soviet government continued to export grain.

Just as the Nazis diverted badly needed railway carriages and manpower from the war effort in order to complete the extermination of the Jews, "at a time when the Red Army was retreating on all fronts and losing tens of thousands every day. . .Beria diverted more than 14,000

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men from the NKVD" for the deportation of the Volga Germans to Kazakhstan and Siberia.

In Communist Yugoslavia, on the island of Goli Otok, "torture was the daily bread of the internees. Among the methods was one known simply as 'the bucket,' which forced a prisoner's head into a receptacle filled with excrement. . . .The most widespread method used by reeducators. . .was stone-breaking. . . .To complete the humiliation, the stones were thrown back into the sea at the end of the day."

China provided "denunciation boxes" resembling mailboxes—complete with forms—on the streets of the cities. Widespread denunciation leading to mistreatment of vast numbers of people was a major practice, most zealously encouraged and institutionalized in the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Cuba as well.

China excelled in the public exhibition and humiliation of "the enemies," especially during the so-called Cultural Revolution. They had "notices stuck on their backs, were dressed up in ridiculous clothes and hats. . .and forced into grotesque and painful positions. Their faces were smeared with ink, they were forced to bark like dogs on all fours. . . .In August 1967 the Beijing press declared that anti-Maoists were 'rats that ran through the streets' and should all be killed." Tortures included forcing people to eat "nightsoil," "to kneel on broken glass," to be "hanged 'like an airplane' by the arms and legs. . . ," and to endure electric shocks. In Tibet people were "not only shot, but were also beaten to death, crucified, burned alive, drawn, quartered, and beheaded."

In North Korea at least forty-seven crimes are punishable by death. Refugees

> have attested to the routine execution of civilians for crimes such as prostitution, treason, murder, rape and sedition. The crowd is invited to participate and sentencing is accompanied by cries of hatred, insults and stone-throwing. Sometimes the prisoner is kicked and beaten to death while the crowd chants slogans.

As in Stalin's Soviet Union, "entire families have been sent to camp because one member has received a sentence. . .this form of punishment was often extended to include three generations. . . .Sometimes the executions were turned into a game with prisoners being shot as though they were targets in a shooting competition. . . ." North Korea has also mistreated the handicapped. Dwarves were sent to camps and prevented from having children. Kim Jong Il said that "the race of dwarves must disappear."

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The crimes of the Cambodian regime are better known thanks largely to its conflict with Communist Vietnam, which after its victory authenticated the massacres. The Cambodian Communist regime perhaps came closest to approximating the ideal type of totalitarian system and its control of the individual. Aside from its well-known massacres and tortures:

> . . .strict dress code was imposed. . . .all public displays of affection were banned. . . .People were forced to attend interminable meetings and while there to look alert. . . .People with handicaps were simply treated as shirkers and executed. . . .People were killed for losing cattle and tortured to death for having struck a cow. . . .Any sexual relations outside marriage were. . .punished with death.

In Cuba, too broad a range of tortures were inflicted on political prisoners:

> Prisoners were forced to climb a staircase wearing shoes filled with lead and were then thrown back down the stairs. . . .The guards also used attack dogs and mock executions; disciplinary cells had neither water nor electricity. . . .Troublemakers were forced to cut grass with their teeth or sit in latrine trenches for hours. . . .The G-2 Center in Santiago de Cuba. . .possesses cells with extreme temperatures (both high and low). Prisoners are awakened every 20 or 30 minutes. . . .Kept naked and totally cut off from the outside world. . . .Iron cages are still used in some prisons.

Homosexuals were put into special forced labor units. Beatings and bayoneting by the guards were common. Public executions "took place in a carnival-like atmosphere."

A few major characteristics of communist political violence may now be better summarized. Above all, people were victimized, for the most part, not for specific actions but for belonging to certain categories, or for suspected harboring of certain ideas, attitudes, or opinions.

The intense desire to reshape social institutions, practices, and human beings themselves is the key to communist political violence and coercion. It leads to an extraordinarily polarized view of the world and human beings and to the dehumanization of all those designated as the enemy. Lenin's description of the enemy as "harmful insects," "lice," "scorpions," or "bloodsuckers," Vyshinky's calling the defendants in the Moscow Trials "rabid dogs" (among other things), the Chinese

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communist designation of the political enemy as "devils," and Castro's preference to call his enemies "worms"—such terminology is a precondition of the brutalization and extermination of large numbers of people.

Communist regimes also claimed that their official values and theoretical guidelines were "scientific," that their goals were rational and the outcomes of their policies predictable—arrived at by the careful deliberation of enlightened leaders guided by an invincible theory. Relying on it guaranteed that nothing in human beings or the social world would be unknowable; the leaders firmly grasped the laws of history, politics, and sociology; the idea of unintended consequences was foreign to scientific socialism and its most qualified interpreters. This vastly increased the self-assurance of the leaders and the regimes in question and removed hesitation when suffering had to be inflicted in the service of the great, scientifically determined goals.

Admittedly, the crimes of communism could not have been committed and the heights of brutality could not have been scaled by human beings obeying the commands of these systems without the human potential for evil, an old-fashioned idea to be sure. These systems excelled in mobilizing and harnessing to their goals the darker sides of human nature because it was done in the (alleged) interests of huge, idealistic projects of social, economic, and political transformation.

If anything can be learned from these crimes it is that they are most likely to be committed when prompted and justified by ideas which promise ultimate and total liberation from all known burdens and deprivations of mankind, to end injustices and scarcities of every description, including those of solidarity and empathy. The magnitude of the crimes was proportional to the political-ideological aspirations and their unattainability. Only when good intentions are single-mindedly pursued by human beings who have seized uncommon amounts of power will crimes be institutionalized on the scale we have witnessed in communist states.

Paul Hollander

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An Irish Statesman and Writer

MEMOIR: MY LIFE AND THEMES. By Conor Cruise O'Brien. Cooper Square Press. $30.00.

CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN has had a life with a variety of themes, including public service (the Irish Foreign Ministry and the United Nations) and the academic world (in the United States and Ghana); he is the author, among other books, of a respected biography of Edmund Burke; he had a career in politics as an Irish member of parliament and in journalism, as editor for *The London Observer*. The most fascinating part of his autobiography, however, deals with his early days in Ireland.

He came from a well-known and well-connected but not well-to-do family in Dublin, divided, like most Irish families, by the great political issues of the day: Home rule, the Easter Rising of 1916 (O'Brien was born one year after), and, later on, the civil war and the IRA. One uncle, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, though a pacifist, became a member of the insurgents' war council and was killed by the British on Easter Monday; another uncle, Tom Kettle, died in British uniform fighting on the Western front in World War I. The family was poor and O'Brien lost his parents while he was still quite young. He attended good schools and won scholarships to Trinity College, Dublin. His early recollections include Yeats and the O'Casey controversy. O'Casey was a famous playwright but his plays, notably "The Plough and the Stars" deeply offended Republican sensibilities, debunking some of the Easter Rising mythologies; like many other leading Irish writers he left his native country.

Conor grew up a nationalist like most of those around him, but his relationship to Irish nationalism (and, *a fortiori*, to the Catholic Church) was dented early on by a variety of circumstances: Protestant neighbors, attending a Protestant school (Sandford Park), and, above all, no doubt an innate spirit of rebellion against established authority. As a student he drifted into the orbit of Kingsley Martin's weekly *New Statesman* and *Nation*, a major intellectual influence at the time, radical, fellow-traveling, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist but at the same time pacifist.

O'Brien's reputation as a young man was that of a fiery left-winger but this did not preclude his being employed by the Irish Foreign ministry, or Department of External Affairs as it was then called—which consisted of a very few people at the time. Ireland was a small place, almost a face-to-face community, in which everyone knew everyone else and O'Brien came to know intimately the leading figures of the day such

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as Eamonn de Valera, the president of the Republic. O'Brien's interpretation of a bizarre episode is of great interest. When Hitler committed suicide in late April 1945, de Valera in full regalia and on foot made his way to the German embassy in Dublin to pay his condolences on the occasion of the death of a fellow head of state.

According to common wisdom, at the time, De Valera was acting in accordance with strict protocol. O'Brien states that he acted out of clever political calculation. A presidential election was around the corner and de Valera assumed that annoying the British would do him a lot of good with the Irish electorate. He was not a fascist, he knew little and cared less about the subject; he had come down hard during the war on the IRA which wanted to turn Ireland into an anti-British base with the help of the Nazis. But de Valera also knew instinctively (and probably shared) the worldview of the overwhelming majority of his compatriots; their horizon did not extend beyond Britain, and Britain had been the enemy since time immemorial.

This kind of attitude provides the key to an understanding of virtually all fervent nationalist movements, and especially those of small countries. (It was true even with regard to the widely educated and most cosmopolitan among them such as Nehru.) In their hearts they all remained single-issue, provincial politicians. They all had a traditional arch enemy (some, like Poland or India, had two), and they all subscribed one way or another to Wolfe Tone's famous dictum, at the time of the French Revolution, that the hour of their arch enemy's difficulty was the hour of their opportunity.

Ireland joined the United Nations relatively late and remained neutral in the Cold War; and on some occasions had kept a safe distance from United States policies. Thus it came as no surprise that Hammarskjold, the then-secretary general of the UN, would ask the Irish government for O'Brien (who had previously represented his country in the General Assembly) to be seconded to his office as a political adviser. In this capacity O'Brien was preoccupied with the Katanga crisis and Patrice Lumumba (about whom he later wrote a play). At the time it seemed a major tragedy, largely the fault of the European colonial powers. Decades later it seems no more than one of the first in a chain of African tragedies—largely the doing of generations of African leaders. After a few years as an international civil servant he was invited by Nkrumah of Ghana to become Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana. He thought very highly of this African leader, but was gradually estranged by his megalomania, his intellectual pretensions and duplicity, which eventually led to O'Brien's dismissal. There followed for a little

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while the prestigious Albert Schweitzer chair at New York University, a career in British journalism and eventually in Irish politics.

O'Brien's views shifted a great deal from his early *New Statesman* days and the neutralism of the early sixties. His African experience and, above all, the exposure to Irish politics and the IRA helped in shaping his learning process. He had always been a little skeptical about Irish nationalism in its most extreme form and now realized that beneath the surface of a progressive, even Marxist-Leninist, ideology there had always been a hard anti-democratic, anti-liberal, even para-fascist kernel. While the IRA had never been very popular in the Republic it took courage to be an outspoken critic of the men of the gun in the seventies and eighties.

Though O'Brien has spent much of his life outside his native country this well-written autobiography with its shrewd observations and excellent vignettes of contemporaries and colleagues is most revealing about Ireland, which remains the main focus. With all the setbacks and personal tragedies suffered it is not a sad book, the ebullient spirit of his early Dublin days keeps O'Brien going.

Walter Laqueur

In the Key of Q

Quarrel & Quandary: Essays. By Cynthia Ozick. Alfred A. Knopf. $25.00.

Here, then, after the contrapuntal pleasures of *Art & Ardor*, *Metaphor & Memory*, and *Fame & Folly*, is Cynthia Ozick in the key of Q. But quarrel, in the Yeats line that introduces this, her fourth volume of essays, is engaged, under the name of poetry, more particularly with oneself. So the essays here included seem dominated above all by a sense of quandary or "mazy indecision," the exploratory tentativeness that, since Montaigne, has been a touchstone of the genre.

The book is in some ways an inspired miscellany—Ozick in Q major *and* Q minor, as it were. Readers will find essays on James and Forster, to whom Ozick has frequently turned in earlier volumes, but also on

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such Hebrao-Judaic themes as the fate of Anne Frank's diary and the Book of Job. Less familiar to readers of her essays will be long developments on Raskolnikov—evoked as Dostoyevsky's Unabomber—and the translation of Kafka. There are short appreciations of Gertrude Stein and the much admired Sebald, a virtuoso riff on as humble an object as a ladle, a glorious concluding essay on New York's Phoenix-like ability to re-emerge, different from itself, out of its own ruins, and a series of autobiographical pieces on losing a first job, falling in love, and discovering Eden as a child in a garden behind a Bronx pharmacy.

There is, nonetheless, a coherence in Ozick's vision here, though it is best gauged against the backdrop of her stunning earlier volumes. If poetic "quandary" seems to trump polemical "quarrel" in the present case, it may be said that at the inception of Ozick's career as an essayist it was precisely polemical "ardor" that had the drop on "art." Indeed the heart of the early essays lay in the polemical force of a very Judaic ardor directed against an all-too-pagan or "idolatrous" art. Ozick wrote with consummate sophistication, but it was as though the Second Commandment were all the literary theory she needed. Her source was the theologian Leo Baeck on "romantic religion." Paganizing, sentiment-bound Christianity was prototypically romantic, and, as such, the model of aesthetics, in its cultish dimension, itself. Against the ambient "romanticism," Ozick would revive a neo-classical sensibility: wed to the Law and its commandments, fundamentally deed-bound, in a word, Jewish. In a profound way, the very notion of a "Jewish writer" was said to be an oxymoron. Abraham—in skirts, no less!—had come to destroy the idols.

To say as much, though, is to overlook the profound pathos of Ozick's achievement, which came across as anything but "applied" Baeck. For both thematically and stylistically, it was clear that no one would pay a higher price for the dismantling of the aesthetic "idol" than Ozick herself. One did not write that resplendently without having more than a passing investment in the aesthetic, and indeed the essays told us of full decades of presumably deluded enthrallment to the later Henry James, then the "aesthetic paganism" of E. M. Forster, decades whose fruit her readers, to their ravishment, were now partaking of amidst paroxysms of ambivalence the author herself did everything to sustain. It was as though Abraham, never more the son of his father Terach, had decided to convert his reader to idolatry before destroying the idols. In the idiom of Ozick's fiction, we were "pagan rabbis" all, victims of that "dual curriculum" (*The Cannibal Galaxy*) in which Arnold's classic

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conflict of Hebraism and Hellenism, in degraded form, had come down to us.

All this was compounded by a second paradox. This neo-classicist had identified her golden age as the nineteenth century. For the "novel at its nineteenth-century pinnacle was a Judaized novel." In a genre that had not—from Joycean epiphany to Proustian "essence"—as yet gone sacramental, George Eliot and Dickens were interested in conduct and its consequences and as such were tendentially Judaic. So the breath-taking stylist polemicizing against the allurements of style was also the anti-Romantic nostalgic for the nineteenth century. It was as original a configuration as the 1980s brought us, and one could only wonder how long those unstable contradictions could be productively sustained. Or rather, the overriding question became how long could Ozick entertain the drama of her own awakening from, say, James-induced illusions she would, after all, be at the same time obliged, at the risk of a certain bad faith, to nourish, if only in order the better to emerge from them.

An answer of sorts is provided in the prefatory essay to *Quarrel & Quandary* where Ozick, after voicing her almost temperamental resistance to "the political," presents the "central question" of her new volume in these terms: "is politics a distraction from art, or is it how we pay attention to the life that gives rise to art?" It is the premise of the question that intrigues. For "art," which in *Art & Ardor* had seemed an all but irresistible distraction from what alone loomed central, the ethical mandate of Judaism, Baeck's "classical religion" *par excellence*, is here identified as what is most deserving of protection from what may or may not be the "distraction" of politics. And if, at some level, the "political" and the "ethical," in their this-worldliness, mesh, it will be seen that Ozick, within the apparent continuity of her contrapuntal titles, behind the seamless splendors of her unflaggingly alluring prose, has enacted a full-blown chiasmus or crisscross.

The four volumes of essays, to my knowledge, never address the shift, but it is discussed in a *Paris Review* interview of 1987, where Ozick, following "a conversation with a good thinker," reached the conclusion that "you simply cannot be a good Jew if you repudiate the imagination." In sum, she "no longer [thought] of the imagination as a thing to be dreaded. . . ." This was, of course, a major shift—if not a quiet repudiation—in relation to much that had preceded the fateful conversation. And it may be wondered whether the splendors of her prose have not blinded many to the question raised by that discontinuity or implicit palinode. And yet there is an odd continuity, beyond the reversal, that joins the earlier and the later volumes. For whereas "romantic reli-

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gion"—be it Christianity or "sacramental" modernism—threatened to swamp the this-worldly, history-wise ardor of classical Judaism in the earlier volume, it is the idealist spirituality of universalist politics that now threatens to drown the sensuous specificity of the work of art itself.

There is a fine essay, for example, on the translation of Kafka, in which a certain exalted impossibility of translation *pace* Benjamin is made to resonate with a comparable "impossibility" at the heart of writing itself, as lived by Kafka. And in the face of those twin impasses, the two eminently fluent versions of *The Trial* currently available in English—the Muirs' Kafka-in-the-voice-of-Somerset-Maugham and the more recent Mitchell effort at a colloquial American Kafka—seem all too well-intentioned betrayals. Well-intentioned betrayal, the "loathsomeness" of ordinary wisdom, it turns out, is the subject of the important essay following the Kafka piece, "The Impious Impatience of Job." For "Job," among other things, is a meditation less on the betrayals of Job's would-be consolers or friends than on a hurt or antinomy so deep that friendship itself may be *essentially* too superficial *not* to betray it. (At which point, we may note how far from E. M. Forster's classic encomium to friendship Ozick has come.) And if one wanted an emblem of the depth of that reality, it would be the pre-Israelite God-names (El, Eloah, Shaddai) in the text: for they are all "papered over" by the "seamlessness of translation." Once again, the translator as (false) friend, the drama of what Kundera, in a volume that resonates deeply with *Quarrel & Quandary*, calls *Testaments Betrayed*.

The essay following the development on Job, "Who Owns Anne Frank?" is explicitly about a legacy betrayed. Here the subject is the active complicity of Otto Frank in the bowdlerization of his daughter's diary lest it appear unduly Jewish. The situation was further aggravated—that is, the ordeal of Anne Frank further "infantilized, Americanized, homogenized, and sentimentalized"—when the diary moved to Broadway, at which point "the particularized plight of the Jews in hiding was vaporized into what [Garson] Kanin called 'the infinite.'" It is a circumstance that so rattles the author that she proposes, quite provocatively, that the "Holocaust-denial industry" is itself "in part a spin-off of the Anne Frank industry." And thus it is that in the name of a universalizing "wisdom," Lillian Hellman and Anne Frank's other dejudaizing sympathizers join up, within the logic of Ozick's volume, with the "friends" of Job and the all-too-fluent translators of Kafka.

There are other nefarious universalizers in the book, all evoked in memorable terms. Styron's celebrated novel on a Polish-Catholic victim of Auschwitz is provocatively seen as "a softly polemical device to

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detract us from the epitome." The essay on Dostoyevsky—linking Raskolnikov and the Unabomber—is, among other things, a meditation on the "violence of humanitarian visionaries." Curiously, the tradition against which Ozick polemicizes might well find its patron saint in Zola. For when the hero of the Dreyfus Affair—but Péguy always claimed he had usurped that role—transposed the Affair into novelistic form (*Vérité*), he capped things off with a benign prophesy of an enlightened world happily without anti-Semitism since it would be happily "without Jews." It is a line of thought that Otto Frank all but echoes. And the tradition in which Ozick *writes* might well find its patron in the Freud so deeply antagonistic to Woodrow Wilson's idealist universalism that he was inclined to compare the American President to the psychotic Dr. Schreber.

We are far, then, from the polemic of *Art & Ardor*. Art no longer threatens to engulf and neutralize Judaic ardor. It appears, on the contrary, to be as threatened as Judaic specificity itself by engulfment by the forces of idealizing universalism. One may speculate on the development. Art was originally idolatrous and the prototypical idol was murderous Moloch, a circumstance that allowed Ozick to insist, long before the French, that fascism was at bottom a national-aestheticism. A Jew, as Maurras put it, could never understand Racine. But in very short order, France herself, in a globalized, Americanized, Brusselized world, has come to seem a tribe no less threatened with (an admittedly gentle variant of) cultural extinction than the Jews themselves. In the face of which, art, the great art of Europe, finds itself on the same side of the polemic—which, for all its reversals, retains the same structure—as the Jews. Hegel, it will be recalled, was certain that both Judaism *and* art were slated for "sublation" in the long run.

Return to the shifting position of "art"—from engulfer to engulfed—in the crisscross structuring the progress, if such be the word, of Ozick's essays. The writers who figured most massively in the author's presumably "idolatrous" phase were James and Forster. Whence the interest, in the current volume, of her identification of a passage from Forster's *The Longest Journey* as the "initiating spore" of her own art, in accordance with what is called James's "germ theory." For Ozick, then, the aesthetic begins at an odd intersection of Forster and James. But the passage quoted from Forster bears a curious relation to the central theme of *Quarrel & Quandary*: Agnes, at a key juncture, says that her marriage to Rickie will not take place "for years as far as we can see." Whereupon it is perceived that Agnes is a liar—because "she said 'we see' instead of 'I see.'" So a detection of the spuriously collective, the false "we," is the

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germinal aesthetic moment *par excellence*—what another tradition might have called the author's *cogito*. Whereby the "tiny horror" informing the discussion of the passage from *The Longest Day*, moving as it does from the James/Forster nexus (highpoint of the aesthetic temptation) to the universalist lure (a spurious "we") appears to span the totality of the chiasmus structuring the four volumes of Ozick's essays.

Forster himself was interested in chiasmus. His term for the figure, as it informs long textual developments, was the "hourglass." In *Aspects of the Novel*, he discusses the "hourglass" as the novelistic "pattern" *par excellence* and chooses as its exemplary case James's *The Ambassadors*: just as Strether, on a mission to bring Chad back to Massachusetts from Paris, discovers the deep wisdom of remaining in France, Chad opts to give up his French infatuation for the resumption of a life of mediocrity in America. Chiasmus indeed: we have moved from Forster as exemplum of James's "germ theory" to James as exemplum of Forster's theory of "pattern" in the novel.

Now for all his admiration of James, Forster is ultimately quite critical of his use of the "hourglass" or chiasmus. For the almost choreographic will to align the novel's action with the contours of the pattern is seen as a "drastic curtailment," indeed a "castrating" of that freedom of action and discovery which is the *sine qua non* of the novel. Such patterning, Forster concludes, might be suitable for the theatre, for Racine, say, but not ultimately for the novel. Might it be that James was at bottom a dramatist expending his talents on what was ultimately the wrong genre?

The observation is significant in this context because the central moment in Ozick's series of essays on James—the single author most discussed in her four volumes—involves, oddly enough, the trauma of James's resounding failure in his sole effort as a dramatist. The discussion of that failure—in 1895, with the booing of James onstage after the first performance of his *Guy Domville*—occurs in "What Henry James Knew" in *Fame & Folly*. It is a profound essay in which James emerges from his trauma as a "literary proto-inventor" of the unconscious, and does so through his will to imagine a novel "that would have all the attributes of a theatrical production." So whereas Forster's James is said to enact, alas, a symbolic "castration" through his unwitting "dramatization" of the novel, Ozick's James discovers, or at least intuits, the unconscious through his felicitous application of the "few, grave, rigid laws" of the drama to the "freedoms and flexibilities of the traditional novel." Somewhere between James and Forster, an unwitting discovery is made, or enacted, that is so far-reaching, so unsettling that one is hard put to decide whether it is a gain or a loss. It brings with it, this intu-

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ition of "the unconscious" (Ozick), this "castrating" (Forster), a deep loneliness and "sacred terror" linked to the deaths of a series of females James had always kept at a cruel distance: Constance Fenimore Woolson and Alice James mentioned in *Fame & Folly*, to whom *Quarrel & Quandary* adds James's cousin Minny Temple. That James's tubercular cousin, spurned by the novelist, should have succumbed to still "another winter in Pelham," a place name shared by the very New York neighborhood where Cynthia Ozick, soon to see herself a victim of (the cult of) Henry James, grew up, is a touch suggestive of just how "through-composed" these essays, in their entirety, appear to be. But, of course, this whole ambivalent reality of James's unwitting premonition of the unconscious has been "repressed," rendered invisible, as it were, to his readers by the "moral radiance" emanating from Leon Edel's compelling biography of the author as exemplary "civilizer." Whereby Edel the biographer joins the catalogue of those benign betrayers—translators of Kafka, friends of Job, adapters of Anne Frank—of the all but unspeakable truths we have already encountered.

One measure of the distance traveled since *Art & Ardor* is a finely etched appreciation of Gertrude Stein, "copycat Cubist" and modernist "icon." The language of icons is, of course, the idiom of idolatry, and might, in the earlier volume, have been made to resonate with Moloch and the "national-aesthetic" regimes of World War II. Not so in *Quarrel & Quandary*. The one reference to the genocide is a note of wonder at how these "two Jewish women of Montparnasse [Stein and Alice B. Toklas] were somehow left unmolested during the War."

The question, it turns out, has a remarkable answer, though it has not been pursued in the present volume, where the matter of the engulfment of the Jews seems a shade less pressing than that of the neutralization of art itself. Gertrude Stein escaped persecution in part because she offered her services as a mouthpiece for Pétain's regime. Pound may have thought Mussolini was Thomas Jefferson *redivivus*, but in 1942 Stein was comparing Pétain to another American hero. In her preface to a proposed edition of Pétain's wartime speeches, translated by Stein herself, she tells us that Pétain "is very like George Washington because he too is first in war first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Like Washington, he "has given them courage in their darkest moment held them together through their times of desperation and has always told them the truth and in telling them the truth has made them realize that the truth would set them free." More surprisingly still, the *maréchal* is said to have defended "his armistice as he had defended Verdun." Stein's Pétain translations were, for contingent reasons, never

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published, but as late as 1943, months after the Vel d'Hiv roundups of the summer of 1942, she was trying to place them in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Her preface insisted that in Pétain's France "every one" was "gradually recovering their liberty and their activity." It is a devastating story, and one can imagine it as a stunning Ozick essay—better suited, perhaps, to *Art & Ardor* than *Quarrel & Quandary*. All of which should be read less as a nostalgia for the specific ardor of the earlier volume than as this reviewer's confession that he has never finished a volume of Ozick essays without finding himself longing for more.

Jeffrey Mehlman

The Demands of a Soul

RAVELSTEIN. By Saul Bellow. Viking. $24.95.

RAVELSTEIN IS A CELEBRATED PROFESSOR of political philosophy—a character based, so it has been said everywhere, on Allan Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind*. I'd better say right away that I know precious little about Saul Bellow's personal life, that I've never met Allan Bloom, and that anyway I do not have the stomach to believe that you can simply translate any life into fiction. The connections and disconnections between Bloom and Bellow and the connections and disconnections between Bloom and Ravelstein may have a certain interest—but not for Virginia Woolf's common reader, with whom I'm happy to identify: we want to read the book, and expect the road into its thickets to be mapped by the book itself.

Okay: so, Ravelstein is a celebrated political philosopher. He is dying of AIDS, and wants to secure his legacy. To this end he asks his friend, an aging writer called Chick—the narrator of the novel—to write his biography. That's the rhetorical premise of the book, which turns out, however, to be a kind of Chinese box of motives and meanings.

For one thing, Ravelstein has a precise idea of what the book of his life should be like: it should be like John Maynard Keynes's memoir of Dr. Melchior, the Jewish head of the German financial delegation at the famously flawed Peace Conference of 1919 (Keynes headed the British

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financial delegation). Why does Ravelstein choose this apparently unlikely model?

Well, there's the question of the Jews—literally the Jews, meaning the men who headed both the French and the German financial delegations, the former the villain and the latter the hero of Keynes's account of the negotiations. Then, the Jews as European scapegoats, available for parody and vicious assault by the assembled leaders, especially, as Ravelstein likes to point out, Lloyd George (Eric Partridge traces the expression "He's a real pisser" to this remark of Clemenceau's about Lloyd George: "*Ah, si je pouvais pisser comme il parle.*"). And finally the Jews as modern history's untouchables. All of these things, especially the last, matter a great deal to Ravelstein and Chick as they cast an assessing eye on the dour end of an astonishing century, a century that, Ravelstein says, has universally declared that Jews have no right to live. Athens and Jerusalem are the points of reference for Ravelstein's life, and as he approaches death Jerusalem grows in importance. Still, I don't think any of this is the main reason for invoking Keynes.

Keynes's memoir begins by laying out the problem confronting the officials engaged in the Peace Conference. The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, intended to do all of the actual negotiations himself, without interference from any of his officials. Consequently, as Keynes tells it, no one was quite certain what if anything was happening or even when the conference would begin. But you couldn't wait too long because "the rooms in the Hotel Majestic were reputed to be of unequal excellence, and he who arrived last might fare worst."

> When I eventually reached Paris early in January 1919, it was as I had expected, and no one yet knew what the Conference was doing or whether it had started. But the peculiar atmosphere and routine of the Majestic were already compounded and established, the typists drank their tea in the lounge, the dining-room diners had distinguished themselves from the restaurant diners, the security officers from Scotland Yard burnt such of the waste paper as the French charwomen had no use for, much factitious work circulated in red boxes, and the feverish, persistent and boring gossip of that hellish place had already developed in full measure the peculiar flavour of smallness, cynicism, self-importance and bored excitement that it was never to lose.

This is the model. The main point, I gather, is that there can't be a better example of prose as the stamp of a certain cultural and world

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view. It's this kind of writing, intimate, precise, urbane, serious in a worldly way, resting on a coherent philosophical outlook—this is the prose Chick is supposed to mimic. Keynes's sensibility has obvious appeal for Ravelstein. We first meet Ravelstein, for example, when he's occupying the most expensive suite in the most luxurious hotel in Paris. Both Chick and Ravelstein have a very large soft spot for the best. Indeed the novel drops the names of the choicest shops for every kind of thing worldwide, as if the life of the mind aligned to Socrates requires discrimination from bottom to top, including of course such shops as Turnbull and Asser. To put it kindly, this is stretching a point, but history shows that readers prefer their novels to contain traces of the life of the extremely rich rather than of those who are extremely poor (and if we have to have the extremely poor, they'd better be quirky and poetic, like the people in Denis Johnson's novels). Ravelstein, in any event, has constructed for himself an ample life whose *ton* would be perfectly familiar to Keynes—a life in equal parts devoted to high policy and to gossip; a life, like Keynes's, comfortably off-center in its sexuality; a life vivid with classy appreciations, splendid acquisitions of beautiful things taken to have as much value as the great men, great events, and great ideas of any given moment.

But because of the rise of mass democracy, Ravelstein, Chick tells us, has had to battle a condition that Bloomsbury, with its achieved even inherited elitism and its exceptionalism and Fabianism, could not begin to appreciate. Ravelstein asks his students: "With what, in this modern democracy, will you meet the demands of your soul?" Ravelstein's reply is classically classical—he has an Aristotelian view of politics as the grandest expression of the passions, and a Socratic view of the passions as wrapped up in Eros, the essential human quality and faculty, the foundation, enactment, and end of human being.

The test of this latter notion doesn't occur until late in the novel, which for the most part wanders through Ravelstein's illness to his death. The peripatetic form seems right—for one thing there's Socrates; and for Ravelstein and Chick, following Socrates, ideas loom large over events; and then there's Keynes's intimate memoir, spoken to his old friends. In the last part of the novel, after Ravelstein dies, Chick and his young wife—Rosamund!—travel to the Caribbean, where he eats spoiled fish and contracts an almost-fatal infection, saved only by Rosamund's devotion, persistence. . .love. And so the novel ends.

It's not clear, from fairly early on, that Chick is up to the assignment Ravelstein imposes on him. In fact the book we get is a novel, not a memoir or a biography. As a novel it persuasively, gracefully portrays

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friendship as an imaginative coupling, the unmoored exhilaration of like minds humming after ideas and ideas-in-things. The fabulous Bellovian patter and genius for detail once more shows Bellow off as the master of rendering intelligence on the page. But love is not so happily rendered in *Ravelstein*. Rosamund is a student of Ravelstein's; but Ravelstein never catches on to her attachment to Chick before the wedding day, which means we never get any experience, as readers, of the courtship between the aging writer and the young student, we never get to see any of the telling details of love. Although Rosamund comes forward at the close as the loving savior of Chick's life, the power of love is not much more than a thought in the novel.

The reason for this is that Chick, as writer, harbors a kind of flightiness of sensibility that keeps him always at a good distance from committing that quintessential Bloomsbury act, represented by E. M. Forster's "Only connect." "A man who knew me well," Chick confides, "said that I was more innocent than any adult had the right to be." This sounds like the sort of thing a character given the slightly absurd, foolish name "Chick" would say. And in fact, if Keynes weren't being pressed on us, I could swear there's a family resemblance between Chick and Ford Madox Ford's John Dowell, narrator of *The Good Soldier*, another book about the turn of sensibility from one age to another, and also a man more innocent than any adult has a right to be. Dowell, like Chick, chronicles the lives of people he claims to know intimately, people he tells us over and over he has been as close to as any human being can be to another. But Dowell turns out to be incapable of intimacy and not to have understood anyone very well.

Chick, like Dowell, is a man apparently short of gravitas; he lacks a certain essential weight to his perceptions and his habits. "I don't suppose," Chick says after Ravelstein is dead—"I don't suppose that when he [Ravelstein] directed me to write an account of his life he expected me to settle for what was characteristic—characteristic of me, is what I mean, naturally." But perhaps Ravelstein was shrewder than Chick supposes. "Ravelstein's legacy to me," Chick says right at the beginning, "was a subject—he thought he was giving me a subject, perhaps the best one I ever had, perhaps the only really important one." We are misled, and maybe Chick is misled, to think that that subject is Ravelstein, or Ravelstein as a study of how the philosophical life should be lived. And insofar as that goes, that's just one example of Ravelstein's trying to get his insubstantial friend grounded. But it emerges that the subject is only partly Ravelstein; the real subject is Chick's, that is, one's own, death. *That's* "the only really important subject."

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By the time Chick is set in contest with his own death, Ravelstein is dead, and can't help his old friend. Instead, his manner of dying, his ideas, and his student, the rose-of-the-world, come to Chick's aid. It's Rosamund's love for Chick, and her faith in love, that enable her to surmount the bureaucracy of the health care system and Chick's virtual indifference to the outcome of his struggle—and death itself.

Ravelstein is a political philosopher. He exhibits in grand gesture and entertaining voluptuousness how the philosophical life should be lived. Chick is at pains to make clear that he's not a philosopher, although he's read the texts. What he is is a writer. The difference between the two, the difference between Ravelstein and Chick, is subtly, amply illustrated in the novel, with Keynes as point of reference, through all those parts of the book that show us Ravelstein and Chick in dialogue. This difference takes on an ambiguous though more emphatic quality after Ravelstein's death, because whatever his devotion to ideas, Chick's sensibility, the dynamic of his being, is finally more visceral, more sensuous, more intellect and less intellectualism, less purposeful than Ravelstein's. It's not that he survives death because of the force of Eros even as lived idea so much as that he has things to do, that he's propelled by a distinctly Conradian discipline, at once fanciful and practical. He's a writer. Even Keynes doesn't bring him closer to a prose Ravelstein would like for himself; he writes neither biography nor memoir but a novel—an especially suggestive and entertaining one.

Igor Webb

The Ultimate Tocqueville

Democracy in America. By Alexis de Tocqueville. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. University of Chicago Press. $28.00.

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* belongs to the company of the hundred or so great works of Western social thought that preceded the rise of the social sciences and that still command wide and serious readership. Social scientists have divided this legacy and found different ways to live on its income. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*

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belongs to the economists in the manner of an heirloom clock. They take pride in seeing it on the mantel but consult their Rolex watches when they want to know the time. Thucidydes is a trust fund for historians who return to the *History of the Peloponnesian War* now and then when the discipline's intellectual resources seem a little straitened. Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* is the drafty ancestral mansion of political science, clung to despite high taxes and a leaky roof. Sociologists for their portion received title to a whole shelf of books by French and Scottish thinkers, but lost everything at the racetrack. Who then owns Tocqueville?

Democracy in America continues to compel attention from historians, political scientists, and a substantial lay audience of Americans who are dazzled by the pertinence of Tocqueville's insights into contemporary American society. To these audiences, I should add one other of which I am part: anthropologists to whom Tocqueville was a pioneer ethnographer and for whom *Democracy in America* is a kind of *Argonauts of the Western Atlantic.*

Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop have translated Tocqueville's most famous work, as they put it, "with a certain reverence." It is, in fact, an excellent translation, but to discover its excellence, the reader must be ready to work through the obstacle that reverence has erected—a straining for fidelity to the French, even if minor adjustments would provide much more fluent English. For rapid reading, the ordinary American reader is probably better served by the widely available Reeve and Bowen translation (1835, 1862) or the George Lawrence translation (1966). For instance:

> Tocqueville. Chapter 6: "Du Pouvoir Judiciaire aux États-Unis et de Son Action sur la Société Politique"
>
> Reeve and Bowen: "Judicial Power in the United States and Its Influence on Political Society"
>
> Lawrence: "Judicial Power in the United States and Its Effect on Political Society"
>
> Mansfield and Winthrop: "Judicial Power in the United States and Its Action on Political Society"

"Action" is arguably an accurate choice for the French "*action*," but is unidiomatic and slightly opaque. The title of the chapter in Mansfield

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and Winthrop's version suggests a chemistry experiment ("the action of sulfuric acid on calcium carbonate") not the vagaries of political life.

Mansfield and Winthrop's preference for the literal shapes virtually every sentence in their translation. Sometimes the result is stuffy: "*constitué le pouvoir judiciare*," translated by both Reeve and Bowen, and Lawrence as "organized a judicial power," is anglified by Mansfield and Winthrop as "constituted judicial power."

But sometimes Mansfield and Winthrop's literalism captures something the other translators missed. For example:

> Tocqueville: "*C'est ainsi qu'aux États-Unis le préjugé qui repousse les nègres semble croître à proportion que les nègres cessent d'être esclaves, et que l'inégalité se grave dans les moeurs à mesure qu'elle avec s'efface dans les lois.*"
>
> Reeve and Bowen: "Thus it is that in the United States that the prejudice which repels the Negroes seems to increase as they are emancipated, and inequality is sanctioned by the manners while it is effaced from the laws of the country."
>
> Lawrence: "Thus it is that in the United States the prejudice rejecting the Negroes seems to increase in proportion to their emancipation, and inequality cuts deep into mores as it is effaced from the laws."
>
> Mansfield and Winthrop: "Thus in the United States the prejudice that repels Negroes seems to grow as Negroes cease to be slaves, and inequality is engraved in mores in the same measure as it is effaced in the laws."

In this case, Mansfield and Winthrop's "engraved" / "effaced" captures Tocqueville's epigram far better than Reeve and Bowen's "sanctioned" / "effaced" or Lawrence's "cuts deep" / "effaced." And Mansfield and Winthrop's "cease to be slaves" retains Tocqueville's carefully uncommitted phrasing, where both Reeve and Bowen, and Lawrence opted for the more conclusive "emancipation." The sense of the passage is that, in Tocqueville's view, ceasing to be a slave is a far shot from genuine emancipation.

In passages like this, Mansfield and Winthrop's literalism gives us a richer text, one to perhaps set next to Allan Bloom's translation of *The Republic*, or Mansfield's own translations of Machiavelli. These are all translations infused with a certain pedantry but which also aim at

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something higher. We are meant to be reminded that Plato, Machiavelli, or Tocqueville breathed a more rarified air than we; that they achieved insights more profound than can be combed from the sumptuous interpretative traditions in which they have been wrapped; and that, as with all powerful and original thinkers, they sometimes expressed themselves in odd and difficult ways. The goal of a translation, according to this way of thinking, is to present a text in which the authentic difficulties remain, not smoothed away by the translator.

This is not to say that Mansfield and Winthrop have indulged in the snide sorts of difficulty championed by Judith Butler and other contemporary "theorists" who claim that to write clearly is to concede to the mind-control of the capitalist state. Bad writing and helpless obscurity pretending to be deliberate choice is epidemic in the academy and, with that in view, it is crucial to observe that the difficulties posed by Mansfield and Winthrop arise from altogether different sources. Their Tocqueville is difficult because they leave the reader in the perplexity of the original author's thought, in a vocabulary slightly askew from contemporary American English, and organized on the page in Tocqueville's jittery sentences and short paragraphs. Tocqueville himself never intends to be obscure, and Mansfield and Winthrop have not made him so. But they have allowed him to be more foreign than his previous translators have, and made him occasionally reach for a different word than a native speaker would.

The result is a *Democracy in America* that seems at once a little less accessible and a lot more intellectually and philosophically textured. The fate of classics is often to lie dead on the page to be served up to unwilling undergraduate readers and all-too-eager scholarly specialists. Mansfield and Winthrop are offering an excellent opportunity to read what has seemed a thoroughly familiar book with fresh eyes. Their own agenda—or at least, one suspects, Mansfield's agenda—may be to promote deeper respect for the republican vision of America's Founding Fathers. The tendency to underrate the complexity and force of the Founders' ideas pervades academic political science; and Tocqueville, who read the Constitution and the Federalist Papers with respect and deep critical understanding, can bring us back into fruitful conversation with that tradition.

But Mansfield and Winthrop leave this as an unspoken implication. Their translation may be an attempt to claim Tocqueville as the legacy that belongs foremost to political philosophy, but the other social sciences still have their claims. For anthropologists, Tocqueville provides an extraordinary example of how to integrate historical research, textual

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sources, and first-hand observation, and then to draw from this a fine-tuned analysis of the cultural logic of a society. No other European visitor of the eighteenth or nineteenth century who committed his thoughts to writing—and there were, of course, many—came close to Tocqueville's comprehensive vision. For anthropology, which made the study of cultural wholes the great quest of the twentieth century, Tocqueville is probably the most important precursor among European thinkers, rivaled only by Montesquieu in breadth of analysis.

But anthropology has fallen on hard times. Many of its practitioners disdain interest in whole societies, to focus instead on the "margins." The cultural dissenter, the misfit, especially the disadvantaged who resist their situation, are riding high in anthropological interpretations of human social life, and the old intellectual enterprise of attempting to grasp a culture or society in its essentials or its entirety is in disrepute. *Wholes* and *essentials* are, according to this view, likely to be only the simplified views of those in power, and the anthropologist who gives license to such views is contributing to the oppression of those who are under the thumb of the local elites.

To be sure, not all anthropologists think this way, but enough do to have set the tone of discussion in the professional journals and the classrooms. Anthropology is haunted by the specter of Marx leading an entourage of lesser wraiths, including Foucault and Gramsci, and a procession of feminist, "subaltern," and other resent-nik acolytes. Tocqueville can be a powerful corrective to the narrowness and cynicism of these views, for he demonstrates that the quest to understand a society as a whole need not entail conceding to that society's dominant myths. Tocqueville's views on the "tyranny of the majority" in the United States, his insights into the darker sides of individualism and equality, and his prescient account of race in America demonstrate an intellectual scope and freedom nowhere approached by Marxian or postmodern analysts.

The example of Tocqueville seems all the more pertinent as anthropology and the other social sciences tackle the massive increase in scale in human societies that is characteristic of our time. Perhaps Mansfield and Winthrop's new translation of *Democracy in America* will inspire a new Tocqueville to write a *Democracy in Russia* or an ambitious account of the laws and mores of one of the other distinct societies emerging in our globalized economy.

Peter Wood

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The Questions Public Intellectuals Usually Don't Ask

ANXIOUS INTELLECTS: ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALS, PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS, AND ENLIGHTENMENT VALUES. By John Michael. Duke University Press. $49.95.

"PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS" STRIKES ME as a spongy term, one lacking in precise definition and fairly itching for trouble. The label started being attached to certain writers at a time when most academic prose—especially in the humanities—had become so turgid, so packed with the jawbreakers of high theory, that general readers were frozen out of the conversation *a priori*. Enter a disparate group of academic types who set out to sharpen the public debate about all manner of hot-button subjects: affirmative action, multiculturalism, hate-speech codes, and political correctness. For the most part, the new class of public intellectuals took a certain pride in being able to conduct their respective debates in plain English and they tried, as best they could, to revive the old days when a nervous, high-energy intellectual style was nearly everything, and young writers dreamed about earning a seat at the table where an older generation of New York intellectuals traded barbs.

That said, however, there are important differences between a loose grouping of intellectuals deeply engaged in the defining struggles of their day (Stalinism vs. anti-Stalinism, for example) and the lesser squabbles that have, for some two decades now, garnered attention, possibly *too* much attention, as the "Culture Wars." As George Orwell once quipped, there are some things that you can only learn at university. What was true then is (alas) even truer now—and apparent to anybody who has ever skimmed a contemporary college catalogue. There are, for example, whole courses devoted to TV sitcoms or dime-novel potboilers, the "constructed female body or how to semiotically 'read' a shopping mall." In such an anything-goes world it is hardly surprising that Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida recently announced its new Ph.D.-granting program in how to become a public intellectual. The lucky ones selected will, we are told, learn how to write articles for such mass-market publications as *Harper's* or even *The New Yorker*.

Leaving aside the larger question—namely, whether such publications are the proper venue for genuinely intellectual thought—the smaller, but nonetheless crucial question is this: How do graduate students read their way through a library of essential books they missed

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out on as undergraduates, and how will reading and discussing essays by the likes of Richard Rorty, bell hooks, Stanley Fish, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. help?

My hunch is that dogging the heels of celebrity super-profs will turn out to be a waste of time, especially if primary works continue to go unread. But in saying this, I realize full well that nobody will fund a Ph.D. program in which lucky applicants are given time and hard cash to spend reading at a library carrel or as they bask on a sunny Florida beach. The people with deep pockets, as well as the administrators who manage what their largesse funds, want to see syllabi, paper topics, and the other accoutrements that come with the academic territory.

That, in short, is the rub in John Michael's earnest, largely unreadable book. He puts a wide spectrum of public intellectuals under the academic microscope and in the process, "interrogates" their work in terms of the anxieties (presumably) bubbling just beneath the surface. I hasten to point out that much of this study in anxious behavior will strike the public intellectuals Michael cobbles together as so much foolishness dressed up in the lingo and cast of mind currently on display at our most prestigious universities. Still, Michael is, let us say, a persistent fellow, and nowhere is he more tenacious than in framing "posers" that he imagines will knock certain public intellectuals off their respective chairs.

But first, as if to make it clear that he can aim touchy questions at himself, Michael asks this: "After all these books [his bulky footnote lists, among others, Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), Todd Gitlin's *The Twilight of Common Dreams* (1995), Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America* (1992), Andrew Ross's *No Respect* (1989), and Alvin Goulner's *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (1979)] what remains to be said on the topic?" A good question, and one that surely points to an eminently commonsensical answer—namely, "*Nothing.*" But, of course, that can't be right in much the same way that an action movie cannot kill off its hero in the first shots. What "remains to be said" at the end of Michael's rhetorical question is nothing less than his book. Why so? Because the others, for all their "dithyrambs and diatribes," share a "fundamental confusion about the character and role of intellectuals in contemporary society." Michael promises his study will set them—and us—straight.

At this point, the interrogation begins in earnest:

> Are intellectuals an empowered elite, or are they a vestigial organ of modernity with no function in a commodity-driven social order

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> that no longer requires the regulative work of representation and legitimation that intellectuals once performed? Can progressive intellectuals speak for the oppressed or does their intervention inevitably produce the silencing and marginalization of the oppressed for whom they purport to act? Can conservative intellectuals preserve the common grounds of a democratic social order, or can they only reproduce structures of privilege and exclusion?

I have quoted Michael at some length—partly to demonstrate that he is the sort of overheated thinker who would rather bash his way into a room than turn a doorknob, and partly to make it clear that his questions arrive with their answers firmly implied.

Indeed, Michael makes no bones about his solid credentials on the cultural Left, and in particular as a tireless booster for cultural studies. Harold Bloom once ruffled certain academic feathers when he pointed out that "Freudian literary study" is *not* Freudian, *not* literary, and *not* study. The same quip can be applied to much that passes for "cultural studies," especially when one begins to see what is collected under the wide umbrella of "culture" and what constitutes "study." Shakespeare, a recent president of the Modern Language Association once famously pointed out, is simply "different" from, say, Alice Walker, just as a pizza is different from a calzone. Notions of which one is *better* simply don't enter into the equation—at least for those who define "multiculturalism" as a version of Chairman Mao's hundred blooming flowers. By contrast, people less adept at moving from Lear to a cereal box rightly wonder when the stone of errant foolishness will finally hit bottom. If Michael's study tells us anything, it is that we have a long way to go before anything resembling legitimate study makes a return.

Meanwhile, the public debate about our national culture rages on, even as one academic dean after another figures that the smart money should get channeled into business departments, computer studies programs, and the hard sciences. I continue to believe that standing publicly tall during the worst moments of the culture wars was necessary, but I also worry that those on both sides of the aisle have not yet been presented with the full, itemized bill. When, for example, deconstructionists proudly announce that there is no such thing as "Truth," they mean to make a playful point. What they don't quite realize is that their linguistic razzle-dazzle undermines (or, in their more fashionable lingo, "destabilizes") the very world that butters their parsnips—for if the "pursuit of Truth wherever it may lie" is so much old-fashioned folderol, then I—and many, many others—say the hell with it.

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Probably nothing was more unsettling to the enterprise of cultural studies than the hoax that physicist Alan Sokal perpetrated on the editors of *Social Text*. It was mischievous in its conception (would a cutting-edge journal buy the notion that gravity is socially constructed?) and even more delicious in its deadpan execution. As the chief honcho at *Social Text*, Andrew Ross (clearly one of Michael's heroes) was caught with his postmodern pants down when Sokal went public about his leg pull. A not-amused Stanley Fish promptly raced onto the opinion page of *The New York Times* to do some "damage control," but his effort to tar Sokal as an unethical fellow only made matters worse. Indeed, in the months that followed Sokal became something of a household name as people who didn't give a fig about postmodernism wrote it off as yet another instance of an emperor parading around the streets with no clothes.

At this point in what has become a very well-traveled story, Michael enters the fray, presumably to set the confusions straight:

> I don't want to dwell on Sokal's own lack of rigor insofar as it is symptomatic of more general problems of greater interest, so I will summarize. First, he offers no sign that he is familiar with, or can position his argument among, the various philosophical opinions, epistemological problems, and ontological issues informing what he calls "social constructivist" or "subjectivist" thinking. For Sokal, for instance, in a way that would have surprised Bishop Berkeley or Hegel, idealism and social constructivism are simply identical.
>
> Second, Sokal offers no argument why these positions must be considered simply wrong, except for the unsupported question-begging statement that they are all wrong and no sane person could possibly disagree.

Anxious Intellects is filled with solemn interrogations of precisely this sort. Michael has the sort of mind that flat-out misses what is obvious (Jump out a twenty-story window and, despite your politics or intellectual posture, you will fall *down*. Period.) and cannot understand what is complicated.

Plodding through this dreary book I was reminded of the anecdote about the eager, thickheaded graduate student who once asked the late Irving Howe to comment on his dissertation-in-progress. He was out to prove that the New York intellectuals scratched each other's backs and that's how they got to be influential, rich, and famous. As Howe

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related the story, he listened to as much of this nonsense as he could stand (which, in his case, I suspect wasn't long) and then replied, "Well, if you change 'back' to 'eyes' you just might have something." If Michael had a better feel for what intellectuals in fact do, he might have written a more penetrating book. For example, he could have done more, much more, with the ways that black intellectuals such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Cornel West, Stanley Crouch, and Shelby Steele cope with the long-standing tensions between an independently minded Self and the expectations of (African-American) society. Is W.E.B. Du Bois's "double consciousness" still a lively trope, or have contemporary black intellectuals, regardless of the stands they take, finally shaken its condition off?

A writer, rather than an academic, should have written this book—not only because the subject is intrinsically interesting but also because it is culturally important. Granted, there are moments when Michael seems to be on the money, or at least close to it, but that is rather like saying that even a busted watch tells correct time twice a day. Scrape away the pretentiousness and what his study tells us is that all public intellectuals share similar post-Enlightenment dilemmas, and, moreover, that they are not "resolvable." But it takes no postmodernist ghost to come out of the grave to tell us that. To live in the modern condition is to live among uncertainties and doubt. My point is that several generations of intellectuals managed to do that—and to do it with grace—in the days before postmodern nihilism grabbed the stage and a public intellectual turned out to be anybody who has ever appeared on PBS's *Charlie Rose Show* or sported a newly minted Ph.D. Those intellectuals who read their way through our great public libraries must be rolling over in their graves—that is, if they aren't doubled up with laughter.

Sanford Pinsker

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A Savage Pen

SELECTED LETTERS OF REBECCA WEST. Edited, annotated, and introduced by Bonnie Kime Scott. Yale University Press. $35.00.

PITY THE TARGET of Rebecca West's wit. She rarely missed throughout a career that spanned nearly the whole of the twentieth century. Especially in her younger years, when she was writing for such feminist and socialist publications as *The Freewoman* and *The Clarion*, her aim was admirably exact and her venom impressive. The early fame she won for her all-out attack mode led George Bernard Shaw, no slouch in the invective department, to say of her when she was not yet twenty-five, "Rebecca can handle a pen as brilliantly as ever I could and much more savagely."

That verbal skill is everywhere apparent in the *Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, a hefty collection from Yale University Press that, though running to nearly five hundred pages, is said to barely scratch the surface of her epistolary output. The letters that editor Bonnie Kime Scott, a professor of English at the University of Delaware, has chosen touch on all of West's major preoccupations—literature, feminism, history, espionage, crime, politics—and they offer a representative sense of West's wide-ranging and restless intelligence as well as her wit.

An example of West's natural comic style, which could be gentle as well as scathing, appears early in the book as she writes to Dora Marsden, the editor of *The Freewoman*, and Grace Jardine, one of the magazine's staff members.

> I hope you're better. The letter which I read to the Discussion Circle sounded as though you felt the calm was doing you good. I must have read your letter with deep expression for subsequently Miss Macdonald rose from her seat and congratulated me on my lovely voice, and kissed me. There is an epidemic of kissing in the Freewoman Discussion Circle. Since you left London I have been kissed by
>
> Miss Macdonald
> Stella Brown,
> Barbara Low,
> Helena Kingscote Greenlaw,
> Miss Gallichan
> and
> A lady in deep mourning with an interest in Eugenics who gives

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> away leaflets on Proportional Representation. In spite of these distractions I have been working quite hard.

West became famous both for her writing and for the iconoclastic way she led her life. First, there was her witty, trenchant take on feminism that also had an admirable sensible side; next came her love affair with fellow author H. G. Wells that produced her only child, Anthony West, who himself became a writer. Added to these was her ability to work in a number of different genres—fiction, reportage, travel writing (in the widest sense), criticism, and political journalism—some of which, especially at the start of her career, were more generally associated with male sensibilities.

She had early struck a blow for iconoclasm with her choice of nom de plume. Born Cicely Isabel Fairchild in London in 1892, she changed her name to Rebecca West after the rebellious heroine of Henrik Ibsen's play *Rosmersholm*.

As for the iconoclastic nature of her personal life, it pretty much rested on her relationship with Wells. They met in a characteristically unconventional manner. Wells had been a favorite target of West's critical writing, and in a 1911 review of his novel *Marriage*, she wrote that his mannerisms were "more infuriating than ever," adding: "Of course, he is the old maid among novelists."

Wells so enjoyed the review that he invited West to lunch with him and his wife. Several years later, the two writers became lovers and their clandestine relationship lasted for ten years. West's unplanned pregnancy produced Anthony, who would go on years later to caricature his famous parents in a novel titled *Heritage*. Its publication whipped West into a frenzy of anger and hurt feelings, duly captured in a number of longer letters here.

Which brings us to the other side of West's life that the letters reveal, one that may come as a surprise to those who know the writer only through her work or via descriptions of her imperious manner. (Not for nothing was she made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.)

In spite of all the evidence here of a masterly literary style and a command of multiple genres, West's personal life appears to have been a mess—she herself admitted she had never been successful in her choice of lovers. Her strength seems everywhere to have been matched by an extreme sensitivity to slights, both social and literary, which is particularly odd in someone so bent on fiercely stating her opinions.

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She had many "difficulties" in life—illness was a persistent one—and they are all catalogued in the letters. First, there were the family stresses. Her older sister, Letitia, a physician, apparently ruled the family with an iron fist once West's father deserted them. The psychological terror she wielded seems to have drifted in from an Ivy Compton-Burnett novel and it eventually drove West to have a nervous breakdown discussed in a letter to writer John Gunther, a friend and benevolent lover.

As for Wells, West was always deeply divided about him. She would say repeatedly that he had ruined her life and yet at the time of his death she could write that though he was a devil and had starved her, he was also "an inexhaustible source of love and friendship to me for thirty-four years. . . .I was the one person he cared to see to the end, I feel desolate because he has gone." She also makes it clear elsewhere that she had to extract herself from him if she was to survive as a writer and to properly raise their son.

Anthony was clearly a trial for his mother from the get-go, but one wonders just how understanding a parent West was. Anthony accuses her of being negligent, she pouts and hollers and accuses him of being ungrateful—and worse. Still, it could not have been a pleasant situation for either of them—a single woman with a child struggling to survive economically in Britain at that time.

Her marriage to Henry Andrews, an international banker, would appear to have been a strange one, even by eccentric British standards. The relationship was devoid of sex, if these letters can be believed, but after Andrews's death a truly shocked and befuddled West discovered he'd been romping around with any woman that would have him.

Add to this the disappointments meted out by a string of uncaring lovers, harsh critics of her works, misguided biographers, and misinformed Wells scholars, and one has a mass of carping—and an abundance of fascinating information and opinion.

What seems most surprising is that someone so repeatedly undone by illness and the bullying of others could have found the time to write so much and often so masterfully.

The letters, then, while providing lots of pleasure, are also invaluable tools to understanding West's career and personality. But younger readers should be forewarned that Scott, in her annotations, is not the best of guides. One example will have to suffice. She calls Israel's Six-Day War of 1967 the "three-day" war. But these kinds of things are minor distractions amid a rich brew.

Robert Leiter

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The Life of a Playwright

EDWARD ALBEE: A SINGULAR JOURNEY. By Mel Gussow. Simon & Schuster. $30.00.

AT THE CHRISTLIKE AGE OF THIRTY, Edward Albee emerged from obscurity as the savior of American theater by penning his one-act play *The Zoo Story*. Unprecedented notoriety followed the success of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in 1962. Still in his mid-thirties, Albee was crucified by the New York critics over his second original full-length play, *Tiny Alice*. The playwright's reputation languished for three decades, but unlike Eugene O'Neill, whose final triumph was posthumous, or Tennessee Williams, who lost and never regained his footing as an artist, Albee witnessed his own Second Coming in 1994, heralded by the laudatory critical reception to *Three Tall Women*.

Mel Gussow, longtime theater critic for *The New York Times*, emphasizes the ultimately ascendant arc of this playwright's career throughout *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey*. This is a friendly biography—Gussow has followed Albee's career and socialized with the playwright since the early 1960s. By focusing on Albee's ultimate rejuvenation, Gussow justifies the polite, even protective stance he takes toward Albee's entire *oeuvre*, which for a time comprised a string of critically drubbed Broadway failures: *All Over*, *Seascape*, *The Lady from Dubuque*, *The Man Who Had Three Arms*. Of Albee's return to critical glory, Gussow writes, "Suddenly, people who had disparaged him in the last decade or more, who thought he was bankrupt as a playwright, were surrounding him with adulation." The implication is that the years of public neglect and critical disfavor were unwarranted, yet without the success of *Three Tall Women* it would have been exceedingly difficult to make that claim.

Gussow acknowledges the elements of Christian allegory in the playwright's biography, noting repeatedly that Albee was greatly disturbed as a young child upon first hearing the crucifixion story. The self-willed martyrdom of Jesus Christ long fascinated if not obsessed him, Gussow notes. This manifested itself in the young Albee's refusal to engage in his studies at Lawrenceville Academy, from which he was expelled, and later at Trinity College, which he was also asked to leave. These rebellions irritated his wealthy adoptive parents and culminated in a complete break with his family at age twenty. The decision to part was Albee's, yet he traces in it echoes of an earlier

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abandonment by his biological parents. This shift in responsibility finds a parallel in Albee's art: in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* George and Martha kill off their imaginary son just prior to his twenty-first birthday.

The theme of self-martyrdom is the key to understanding Albee's career. Following his initial rocket-like ascent, Albee was in the enviable position of producing plays "without undue concern about what the public and critical reception might be." There's the rub. Prosperous and acclaimed, Albee set out to please no one but himself, and succeeded. "I always felt he had ascended up to his cerebral cortex for protection after *Virginia Woolf*," Glyn O'Malley, Albee's assistant director, tells Gussow. The composer William Flanagan—Albee's former beau—expressed concern early on that Albee was indulging in "a reactive, perverse, masochistic high-browism." And Guy Flatley, writing in *The New York Times*, summed up the consensus of the professional critics by dismissing *Tiny Alice* and subsequent works as "inscrutable puzzles, or painful put-ons."

"I write for me," Albee told an interviewer in 1963. "For the audience of me. If other people come along for the ride then it's great." But when other people didn't come along, Albee lashed out, berating the critics for their stupidity and ridiculing the public for its laziness. Gussow includes a series of anecdotes about esteemed actors—Jessica Tandy, Maureen Stapleton, John Gielgud, Ingrid Bergman—who declined parts in Albee projects or trudged through them with little understanding of or appreciation for the writing. Part of the problem may have been the playwright's intellect and his refusal to pander, but these were not novice performers lacking theater savvy. Clearly, something was amiss.

It's possible Albee chose the form, style, and content of his plays with no regard for the audience, but it's also possible he regarded audience members too closely and set out deliberately to displease them, like a schoolboy cutting classes to spite his parents. In defense of his general brattiness as a youth, Albee has commented, "I think that any kid who has any intelligence, any individuality, has a responsibility to rebel against everything." *Everything*? "Rebellion turns into questioning. I question everything." Just months after *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* secured his position in the theater world, Albee announced he was working on a new play, an early version of *The Lady from Dubuque*. "I think it's going to be—I hope it will be—just about unbearable," he commented. From Albee, that's a promise.

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Gussow walks a fine line defending each Albee work while acknowledging the slump in Albee's career and citing its source: the author himself. "*Tiny Alice* opened the door to self-indulgence, and the critical reception encouraged Albee to be stubbornly defensive. At various other points as well, he succumbed to what might be called the *Tiny Alice* syndrome." Albee's themes—reality versus illusion, worlds within worlds, boxes within boxes—yielded undramatic material that, when approached with something less than Borgesian ingenuity, failed to make the leap from banality to profundity. Compounding the problem was Albee's insistence that every project, including the "anti-play" *Box/Mao/Box*, receive full Broadway treatment. Experimental works that might have been more politely received in a smaller venue baffled suburbanites and tourists out for an evening of entertainment, which only exacerbated Albee's contempt for the public—"a most unworthy audience." For ten years following the failure of *The Man Who Had Three Arms*, Albee staged no new works in New York City, in part because Broadway productions were no longer feasible. He finally relented in 1994, by staging *Three Tall Women* off Broadway.

"Experimental" is an accolade usually reserved for works that take formal risks to no good effect. It's the booby prize for failed innovation. Few would categorize *Three Tall Women* as an experimental work because, although it is technically innovative, it is an aesthetic triumph. As was widely noted upon its sensational premiere, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a flawed work. The author's imperative that we abandon our illusions—contradicting O'Neill's endorsement of pipe dreams—isn't very compelling: it's a simplistic case refuting a simplistic case. And George and Martha's implausible collaboration in self-delusion—an imaginary son—makes the plot creak on its literal level. But the play does send the audience on an exhaustive emotional ride and, almost as neatly as *Catch-22*, its title has entered the general vocabulary to denote a previously unlabeled phenomenon: a couple who torture vulnerable acquaintances with stagy bickering.

In contrast, the success of *Three Tall Women* as a literary work is unqualified—Gussow is right to focus on it in his biography. In fact, Gussow's book is a compendium of sound decisions. He surveys Albee's juvenilia and apprentice works quickly and painlessly. He debunks the myth that, because Albee was produced first in Germany, New York theater professionals were too obtuse to recognize his talent. (*The Zoo Story*, in fact, reached the off-Broadway stage with unusual speed for a one-act play by a first-time author.) Gussow admires his subject, but he does not debase the playwright or playwrights in general with an

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explicit Ranking of the Greats. And he examines the artist's fallow period honestly: he suggests Albee's twenty-year bout of heavy drinking, including ten years of debilitating drinking (from 1967 to 1977), sapped him of creative power and left him an arrogant, mean drunk.

"What he had lost (or never had) in his childhood," Gussow writes, "he has been seeking as an adult, and as an artist." The same could be said of any author, but childhood is of paramount concern to an Albee biographer. Albee's unhappy adoption by nouveau riche parents left him with a nagging sense of transience. (They gave him "all the things money could buy.") As an artist, he was confused about where his talent came from. Albee's family members appear in his plays: the grotesques in *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream*, the declaiming WASPs in *A Delicate Balance*, and of course the elderly mother—the anti-muse—at the center of *Three Tall Women*. In fact, Albee's adoption and family drama are central obsessions in his work. "They bought me," the playwright laments, and he seems unable to shake that thought.

Albee has never kept a journal and has rarely corresponded. Thus, Gussow relies on the playwright's memories, his plays, published interviews, and the comments of friends and colleagues, who attest to Albee's influence on a generation of playwrights. It may be difficult now to fully appreciate the affect Albee had on New York theater in the early 1960s—how he freed the stage in terms of language, form, and content for Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson, David Mamet, and others. As John Guare, reflecting on *The Zoo Story*, notes, "Albee spawned an entire generation of park bench plays." Unfortunately, what emerges most memorably from this biography, despite Gussow's best efforts, is not Albee's early influence or his late success, but the fact that Albee suffered a decades-long slump in between. He long fancied himself a prophet rejected by his own people: his biological parents, the Larchmont couple who adopted him, the theater-going public. But in fact, the latter two rejections were the result of his own maneuverings: he chose to rebel against everything, including his success and the role God chose for him as the Messiah of Broadway.

Myles Weber

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Updike's Shakespeare

GERTRUDE AND CLAUDIUS. By John Updike. Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

TO BE CURIOUS ABOUT the unwritten past of fictional characters is one of those forbidden urges that used to cause critics to bind themselves to the mast and sail resolutely away from a natural temptation. Other readers might allow themselves to ask: "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?"—a question mocked in a famous critical essay so titled by L. C. Knights. The primly professional critic knew better than to inquire in that way about a character in a play. Lady Macbeth is just an effect produced by Shakespeare's words, and has no existence beyond them. About her children and their fates, even their number, we never hear a thing; all we know is what she tells us in a famous speech—she had once "given suck." But a good many readers or playgoers have always refused to deny themselves the fun of such speculation. And isn't it allowable, after all?

Maybe the critic ought to remember that what we call the play is an experience that stimulates the reader or playgoer's own invention. The prompting we receive to fanciful imaginings beyond the author's limited story is a sort of creative collaboration of ourselves with him. How *interesting* it is to consider the Macbeths' marriage before the project of murdering Duncan changed everything. In the same way, we can't help wondering what kind of father and husband (his queen is never mentioned in the play) Lear had been when his difficult girls were growing up. What were the details of Othello's early life before he became a Christian convert and the servant of the Venetian state? And what was the real story of the marriage of Hamlet's parents, and how did Gertrude happen to fall in love with her husband's brother?

To read John Updike's elegant *jeu d'esprit* called *Gertrude and Claudius* is to taste the delicious forbidden pleasure of imagining a possible early story to answer this last question—though Shakespeare did not choose to tell it when he wrote *Hamlet*. Updike feels no obligation to forbid himself to respond to the songs of the sirens. He is a novelist, and it is his business to listen to sirens' songs. His "prequel" as he playfully calls it, is, of course, one of his own fictions. It bears all the signs of being an Updike novella. With some transposition of place and costume and social circumstance it might have taken place in his own familiar American suburbia where lust and treachery and ambition weave brilliant, dangerous patterns in the lives of some well-placed,

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easy-living persons. And yet, while making the whole thing feel as up-to-date as one of his *New Yorker* stories, this wiliest of our writers plays a further trick on solemn scholars as well as critics by pretending to be more rather than less historical than Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is an Elizabethan play based on an episode of legendary Danish history already buried in ancient memory when it was retold in the *Historiae Danicae* of Saxo Gramaticus in the twelfth century and retold in the sixteenth century by a French compiler, François de Belleforest, in his *Histoires Tragiques*. Shakespeare picked and chose and altered freely, as he always did when grinding some old stuff through his mill. He was shamelessly anachronistic, making Elsinore into an Elizabethan royal court and filling the head of his intellectual prince with a complex mix of the latest Renaissance ideas. Updike is just as free, though he wants us to think he is taking us back to Scandinavia in the twelfth century; his familiar luscious style is just sufficiently stately in a faintly self-mocking way to give the impression that it is a version of the old chronicles. He gestures at the putative sources by going back to the old Danish names, except at the end, when he approaches the moment when Shakespeare is about to take over, and they become Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, and the rest. Updike has done his homework and implies a real Dark Ages moment—his artful fancy picks up from scholarship authentic descriptive details of dress and the furnishings of houses, and the look of landscapes—just such details as he so splendidly collects for his usual fiction set in a modern scene that he knows directly down to the last detail. He suggests that the story is poised upon an historical curve of changeover from the pagan tribal culture of the Norse grandfathers to the time of first-generation Christians. It was a time when the male brutalism of a ruling warrior-class was still dependent, in part, on warfare and pillage, and modified only a little by new, more settled habits of life, an agrarian economy, trade with the more sophisticated cultures to the south.

Saxo had told how two brothers, Horwendil and Feng, ruled Jutland under Danish King Rorik during a period of feudal strife. Updike "places" them—the elder still a Viking "blond beast" whom his brother calls "the Hammer." "Dull, but he hits you square on the head," Feng remarks some time after he has returned from his travels to places like Sicily and Byzantium. He, himself, is elegant, cultivated, urbane, a man of the coming time. Horwendil kills the King of Norway in single combat and is rewarded with the hand of Rorik's daughter, and, when Rorik dies, the son-in-law is the new king though there are those who think that Feng is "wilier in foreign ways and more apt to circumvent the

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schemes of Germans, Polacks, and Sweathlanders without recourse to war." Feng's jealousy is not only political. He has fallen in love with the Queen.

She, Gerutha, or Gertrude, as Shakespeare will know her, is the person upon whom Updike's tale is chiefly focused, rather than upon her son, about whom we hear only remotely towards the end as a difficult, brooding boy and a cold, skeptical young man more alienated from the old traditions even than his uncle Feng. Gerutha's mother had been a "Wendish princess" whose father had been killed in battle by Rorik's father. The warrior had brought the orphan home, a trophy of war, and bestowed her upon his son, and Gerutha was the only child of this forced marriage. When Updike begins the story, Gerutha is sixteen years old and about to be married in turn by *her* father's will to one of his henchmen, the "beefy" Jute warrior who had served his liege-lord well and given him fair share of the plunder gathered in his raids. "And I am to be plunder in exchange," Gerutha observes, already resigned to marry Horwendil, whom she does not like very much. She will always be the prize gained in male conflicts. But she is an engagingly complex character as Updike sees her, and we come back again and again to contemplate her beauty, her generosity and sensibleness, and the rich sensuality which Horwendil failed to arouse fully (Updike gives her the defect of a little gap between her front teeth, a traditional sign of sensuousness which Chaucer gave to the Wife of Bath). Feng, who loves her long before she becomes his lover, reflects upon

> her good sense, her forgiving gaiety. Passed young from father to husband, oppressed by a husband whose virtues would appeal to her father, she knew her life had skipped something in its stages, but she did not nurse the grudge. So kind she was, so clear-sighted and natural. "Nature" was one of her words which she used as women of other languages spoke of *Der Gott*, *le bon Dieu*, *Iddio*, *Dios*. Feng loved the way that, even as her level gray-green eyes assigned everything its fair weight, her generous lips and the tiny muscles around her lips, played together, as if all words had a joke in them which she could not help tasting.

At the end of Part I of Updike's book, Feng's long-suppressed passion for his sister-in-law has become a conscious obsession, and we are ready for Part II. It is a true Updike erotic fugue, developed by slow degrees with a certain melancholy note of fatalism in it—as though these characters cannot escape the story already written for them again and again.

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Geruthe and Horvendile (Updike switches to Belleforest's version of their names, perhaps to suggest a Renaissance mood) are settled in middle age with concerns about the future of their thirty-year-old son and his possible marriage to Corambis's (that is, Polonius's) delicate daughter. Feng, renamed Fengon, is back from his travels, his passion for his brother's wife still as strong as ever, despite years of absence. The time has come for the laying aside of renunciation and troubadour courtly love, and their trysts begin in a hideaway in the woods lent by Corambis. Fengon brings gifts gathered for her in exotic places, gifts that express his sophisticated taste in all things—including sex—a cloisonné pendant in the form of a peacock, a fantastically engraved and bejeweled goblet, a tunic woven in intricate design in shimmering silk—a fabric at that time unknown in the North. But, of course, someone tells Horvendile, and Fengon must hear himself accused directly by the King for having "bewitched and pierced my most virtuous-seeming queen," words that echo—not precisely, but almost—those of the ghost in *Hamlet*. We are already within the walls of the play. The scene enacted at Hamlet's instigation by the traveling players to "catch the conscience of the King"—Shakespeare's brief cinematic flashback—reels out in Updike's elaborated narrative as Fengon proceeds to the inevitable moment when he pours his vial of poison into his brother's ear and Horvendile's death is assumed to be the result of a snakebite.

In Updike's final chapter, we are at Shakespeare's threshold, and the characters have the names the playwright uses. Claudius marries Gertrude and celebrates the marriage with a ponderous politic speech to the court and a feast, while Hamlet sulks despite his uncle's expressed goodwill. In Shakespeare, the ghost will soon show itself to the son who bears its name, but already Gertrude feels its presence:

> King Hamlet in Gertrude's sense of him became almost palpable, quickening all of her senses save that of sight, her ears imagining a rustle, a footstep, a stifled groan, the nerves and fine hairs of her sixth sense tickled and brushed by some passing emanation, though the corridor was windless, and no newly snuffed candle or fresh-lit fire could account for the whiff of burning, of smoke, of char, of roasting. And upon this sense was visited an impression of pain; he seemed, this less than apparition but more than absence, to be calling her name, out of an agony—Gerutha, as she had been in the deeps of time.

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In his "Afterword," Updike suggests that Shakespeare's play is to follow what he has written. His Hamlet has not yet heard the ghost's story and vowed revenge. All the dire consequence is still to come. Or is it? Updike's Claudius foresees—perhaps deludedly, but perhaps not—that he will reign on the throne for another decade, that Ophelia will marry Hamlet, who will peacefully succeed him. "He had gotten away with it. All would be well." There is, in fact, no sense of inevitability. One outcome is as probable as the other. Like the chronicles with their "and then. . .and then," Updike avoids the closing down of story in favor of history, which says that nothing is ever finished just as beginnings go back forever into "the deeps of time."

Shakespeare knew this when he studied the old record, focusing on a son's assumption of the duty of revenge, picking up such things as the pretended madness and how Hamlet, scolding his mother, discovers and kills the spy hiding in her room, and how he is dispatched to England under the surveillance of Claudius's agents with instructions that he be put to death, but finds the letter they bear and substitutes their names for his own. Shakespeare ends his play with his hero's and nearly everyone else's death including that of Laertes, whose story he adds in, the successful avenger of the deaths of his own father and his sister. Shakespeare litters the stage with corpses and brings in a foreigner, Fortinbras, to take over as Denmark's ruler, to make a terminus. But Saxo's Amleth succeeded better than Shakespeare's Hamlet; Feng was killed by an exchange of swords, as in the play, but, unlike Hamlet, Amleth survived and was crowned King. He had the prospect of further life, just as Updike's Claudius has, and, indeed, for a while, could feel "all will be well." There was material for a *se*quel to Shakespeare's play in the chronicle record of Amleth's success until, after a while, all is not well, and a further round of murder and revenge ensues in which the English and Scottish rulers have become his enemies. He dies at last at the hand of a new ruler who has succeeded to the Danish throne—whose life, for all we know, will take the same course.

But Shakespeare knew that *stories*, unlike life, not only have beginnings but also endings. It is only life that is an endless middle, an interminable on and on.

Millicent Bell

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Generation Exodus

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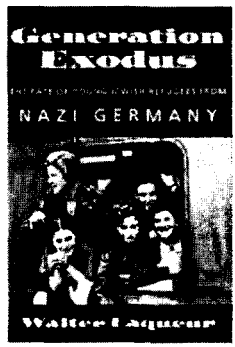

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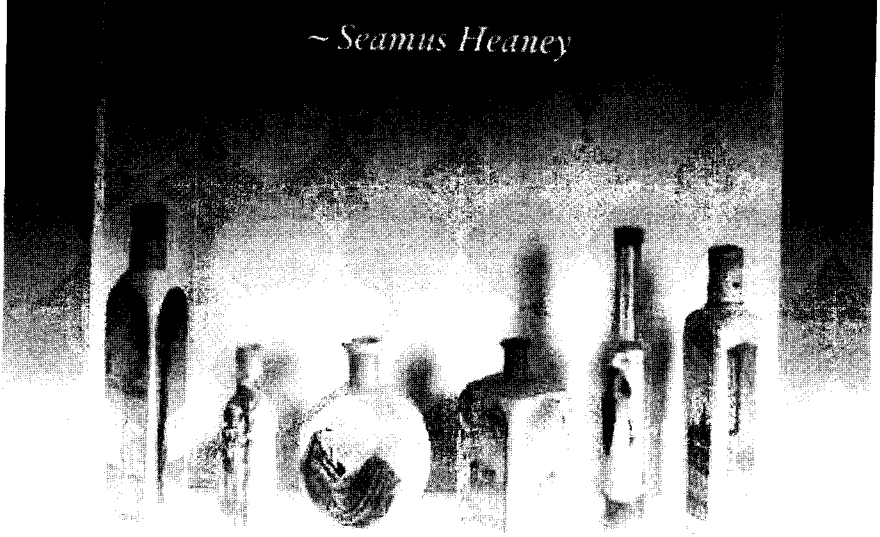

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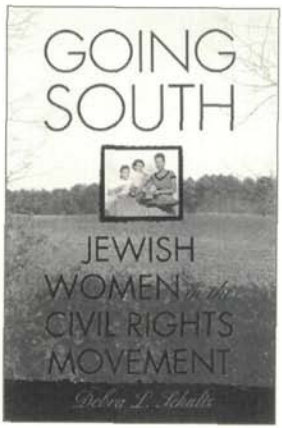

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